

Literacy and basic education for adults

an examination and assessment of the factors influencing participation and success

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‘Literacy and Basic Education for Adults: an examination and assessment of the factors influencing Participation and Success.’

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D.

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Rob Mark,
Belfast,
Northern Ireland.

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Summary

‘Literacy and Basic Education for Adults: an examination and assessment of the factors influencing participation and success.’

Recently literacy has advanced to the forefront of an agenda of social inclusion, participation and active citizenship that has led to a renewed interest in its development in the European context. Literacy is increasingly being viewed not simply as a means for providing a skilled workforce or for providing elementary social and life skills for survival in the modern world, but as a powerful tool to challenge inequalities and dependencies and to promote social change. While few might question the importance of literacy skills and the need for a basic education in to-day’s world, there is little agreement about fundamental questions on what literacy is and how success might be measured. Furthermore there is a growing concern for the very many adults who do not take up learning opportunities and how provision that is attractive and appealing can be developed for diverse groups of adults.

This research seeks to answer some basic questions about what literacy and quality are, and explores links between literacy, widening participation, and the measurement of quality in Adult Basic Education (ABE). It examines the conflicts and contradictions that exist and proposes a consensus model for measuring success in ABE which is based on the views of those with an interest in literacy (referred to as the stakeholders), and which includes the views of learners as well as those whose job it is to create learning opportunities for individuals and groups. The study is based on the notion that measuring success should be something, which is owned and developed by all those with a vested interest in ABE. The research identifies factors affecting participation in ABE in Northern Ireland, and examines and tests a consensual quality model, for improving participation and success.

The introduction establishes the writer’s credentials for writing about literacy. Becoming literate is part of the writer’s own life experience and from his perspective as a literacy tutor and manager, he utilises this experience to discuss problems and issues which the research is seeking to answer. This includes questions about how to improve literacy skills, how to widen participation and how to improve the overall quality of provision. The links between literacy and life experience are established and the importance of understanding conflicts and contradictions when talking about literacy. Literacy is not simply a pedagogic question, but is part of the wider debate about lifelong learning and social inclusion. It is therefore a question that concerns not just educationalists, but a range of other professional people working in the public and private sectors which might include health workers, social and community workers, managers and industrialists, trade unionists etc. Agreeing a rationale for literacy and its measurement also involves negotiation with learners and groups in the community who have an interest in ABE. It must therefore be viewed as an issue of both pedagogic and political importance over which no one group should have a total monopoly. Defining its area of concern, managing its organisation and devising approaches to measurement are as such concerns of a wide range of interested groups.

In the first chapter, the meaning of literacy and ABE is explored and a shift in paradigms of literacy is identified. The growing awareness about the need for improving literacy skills is established from international studies on adult basic education. The contradictions that emerge when discussing the meaning of literacy is highlighted and the different models of analysis that have emerged are discussed – ie. Literacy for functioning in society (at home or in work), literacy for transformation, and vernacular or local literacy for promoting culture, and development as part of the everyday life experience of the individual or group.

The second chapter traces the emergence of policies and practices in literacy in Northern Ireland and the extent of local need as highlighted in national and international studies. It demonstrates the wide variety of provision that exists, and the emergence of new approaches and practices that seek to improve performance. In particular it demonstrate a growing concern for quality in ABE and its emergence as a major issues in the past decade.

In the third chapter, a range of complex factors, which affect participation in adult basic education, are examined and approaches to improving participation and success are discussed. This chapter also looks at the value of qualitative research as a tool for illuminating practices in adult basic education. Findings from two studies on participation in ABE carried out in Northern Ireland in 1995 & 1997 show a close correspondence to findings from studies elsewhere. The importance of tackling the barriers to participation is highlighted, and the relationship between participation and successful practice is established.

The fourth chapter examines the growing importance of quality and the questions it raises for educators. The chapter examines different models of quality and the importance of the customer in determining what it is about. These issues are first discussed and then applied to the ABE context. The problem in determining what is good adult basic education is highlighted and the implications that this has for developing models of quality enhancement.

In the penultimate chapter, *Chapter 5*, findings from a study on quality and adult basic education, carried out in Northern Ireland, are reported. A model for measuring quality, which provides a framework for evaluating ABE, is examined. The framework results from extensive discussions with interested groups, including managers, organisers, tutors, policy makers and adult learners. It provides a model for practice which identifies benefits and drawbacks of existing provision and which can develop new ways of improving practice. The research is also informed by another research project on quality and adult learning which was carried out concurrently with this research. The project, part of a European funded Socrates research project, was carried out in four regions of the EU. The Northern Ireland study is in part linked to this research project and the EU research project therefore influenced the methodology and processes adopted in the Northern Ireland study.

The quality framework that emerged for the Northern Ireland research consists of five guiding principles for ABE, six quality statements about student experience of programmes and ten quality statements about management of programmes. An evolving framework emerges which reflects local needs and which can be added to or adapted in the future.

Later in the chapter, a method for implementing the model is proposed and tested. Initial findings arising from implementing the model are examined and discussed. Findings indicate advantages and drawbacks. The stakeholders involved in the pilot implementation were found to be interested in reflecting on the quality of provision and considering how quality might be affirmed or improved. What was initially perceived as an inordinate time commitment became less of a factor for those involved. Increased understanding of the role of each stakeholder was reported and on the skills of reflection and analysis needed for improving quality. The stakeholders each made a significant contribution to the development of a comprehensive framework for measuring quality. Their comments indicate that the framework that emerged provides new and innovative ways for discussing and analysing quality in a way that is acceptable to everyone. It was felt that the framework would facilitate better working relationships and ultimately better quality of provision in the future. Perceived drawback included a lack of familiarity with the language of quality and the difficulties in involving some groups such as part-time staff and volunteer workers in quality improvement in ABE. Adequate funding to promote change was seen as a key issue for improving quality. As quality is a developmental process and one where new ideas are constantly being introduced, the quality process must be seen as an evolving one. To ensure successful outcomes funding structures must take this into account.

The research demonstrated that a focus on quality issues can produce positive elements of change in the management and practice of ABE, encouraging critical thinking about practices and acting as a catalyst for change. The development of an agreed model for measuring success was found to have something new to add to the process of quality assessment and for raising standards and efficiency in ABE. An emphasis on quality also raises questions about exclusion of certain groups from provision, and the need to develop practices that can encourage wider participation from excluded groups.

In the final chapter, *Chapter 6*, the key issues emerging from the research are summarised. Problems in applying quality concepts to ABE are discussed and the issues which this raises for widening participation. The research also highlights how dominant approaches influence our understanding of literacy and the kind of policies and practices that emerge. Different ideologies exist and our understanding of literacy, quality and how to widen participation, is inevitable influenced by the political agenda. Politicians and those whose job it is to implement political decisions develop policies and practices and they target financial resources at addressing the issues they have identified. This places restrictions on the way in which we think about literacy, quality of provision and consensual models that emerge tend to reflect these dominant ideas. A further problem is the limitations imposed by the stakeholders themselves who may be unwilling or unable to take certain issues on board.

The need to examine new approaches to literacy and quality management which will widen participation is highlighted - for example, the need to value literacy in both formal and non-formal contexts and to develop models relevant to a variety of learning contexts. Findings imply a need to rethink policies and practices in ABE to ensure that they have a broad range of support among stakeholders, and when measuring success to develop new approaches to widening participation based on more inclusive approaches.

Finally the development of literacy provision and the measurement of quality is linked to the ongoing debate about lifelong learning and developing quality learning across the lifespan. The need for more research on ABE, which can inform the debate about literacy, quality and participation, is acknowledged.

Rob Mark

Chapter 1: The Meaning of Literacy and Adult Basic Education

***'Literacy is a powerful determinant of an individual's life chances and quality of life'
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 97:11)***

***'Definitions of what it means to be literate are always shifting'
Powerful Literacies (2001:1)***

A lack of a basic education or illiteracy as it is sometimes called, has been described as one of the world's major social problems. There is no country or community, which can claim to have a population that is permanently and completely literate. Dominant assumptions about literacy are increasingly being challenged by new research and practice, which is redefining what is meant by literacy. New modes and conventions for communicating through information and communication technologies are also raising issues about what counts as *real* literacy.

In Europe, discussion about literacy may be located within a modernisation process, which has gained momentum since the end of Second World War. Attempts to come to an understanding of what is understood by literacy and how to meet needs have opened up a whole new debate. Different ways of looking at literacy have developed. On the one hand there are those who advocate a *functionalist* view of literacy, based on a deficit model, emphasising the need to develop basic technical skills of reading and writing etc. On the other hand there are those who see literacy as part of a wider political debate about who defines literacy. This debate is sometimes referred to as the ideological debate about literacy: it emphasises a greater involvement of adults in the literacy process by empowering them to take control of their own needs and to value their everyday life experience when talking about literacy. The model recognises difference and diversity in peoples' lives and the need to challenge power relationships thus enabling adults to effect change in their lives. For this reason this approach is sometimes referred to as the radical model of literacy.

ABE cannot be divorced from wider political debate about education, its goals, and how we meet the lifelong learning needs of adults throughout the life span. It is also part of the debate about how different ideologies influence the way we think about ABE. In Northern Ireland, ABE is very much linked to the modernisation process. The emergence of a new democracy is opening up new debates about literacy, what it can achieve and the kind of practice that might emerge. Ideological tensions are also present in the debate which are opening up new perspectives for debate. Many of the issues are similar to those discussed in the international arena. There are also, however, issues specific to the local context, such as how to best promote literacy in a divided society and the kind of role it can play in building peace and harmony between communities and in reducing community conflict.

Educators debate terms and concepts and there is much disagreement between them. These differences which exist in meanings and interpretations will be examined later in this chapter. For example, some would argue that the concepts of literacy and adult basic education have different meanings when applied to different contexts. However, in this research, these terms are used interchangeably to convey the same meaning.

1.1 International awareness

Prior to the Second World War, missionaries and philanthropic bodies attempted to tackle the problem of illiteracy in the international arena. These were of value only to a small number of people and had little impact on the problem of mass illiteracy. Since 1945, the United Nations, through its scientific and educational body UNESCO, has become pre-occupied with the problem of illiteracy. In 1957, a statistical survey entitled, *World Illiteracy at Mid-Century*, stressed the need for a large-scale adult literacy campaign. By 1964, a new approach was adopted and intensive projects rather than campaigns were advocated. The 1960s are often seen as a turning point for literacy when campaigns for the eradication of illiteracy were mounted world-wide. In 1976 the Director General of UNESCO stated that illiteracy was not only a problem of developing nations but also a world-wide problem. He noted that some industrialised nations were also becoming aware of the problem.

A number of attempts have been made by national governments and international agencies to quantify illiteracy and there are numerous reports indicating levels of illiteracy throughout the world. In most of the developing countries, statistics quoted are likely to refer to completely illiterate persons. In the

industrialised countries, however, illiteracy is usually associated with poverty, disease and low productivity and improving literacy standards is seen as an important step in tackling these problems.

In the developing countries, illiteracy has been linked to population growth and even though the literacy levels have improved, the absolute number of people with literacy problems continues to increase because programmes are unable to keep pace with the population explosion.

1.2 The extent of need

Since the average standard of education in industrialised countries is different to that of developing nations, the levels required in literacy and other related skills are unsurprisingly different. In the industrialised countries the term *functionally illiterate*, has been used to refer to persons who possess varying degrees of skill in literacy, but who do not possess reading and writing skills necessary to cope with everyday living.

Studies carried out in 1996, by three intergovernmental organisations (*the OECD, UNESCO's Institute for Education and the European Union*), have provided comparable data on functional levels of literacy in the industrialised world¹. The *International Adult Literacy Survey-IALS*, made it possible to gather data that yielded evidence from three distinctive aspects of literacy - *prose literacy, document literacy and quantitative literacy*. The study revealed significant literacy skill gaps in every country examined. Many could not perform at *Level 3*, the level regarded by many experts as the minimum level of competence needed to cope adequately with the complex demands of everyday life and work in knowledge societies in the twenty-first century. (OECD, 97:3) The IALS estimates put the numbers of adults unable to perform basic tasks as ranging between 8% in Sweden to 43% in Poland. (DENI : 98). 22% of the population in Britain, 24% of the population in Northern Ireland and 23% of the population of Republic of Ireland did not reach the minimum level of competence. This indicates that around one quarter of the adult population in Northern Ireland lack the basic skills defined as necessary for the demands of everyday life within the *IALS* study.

1.3 The benefits of literacy

Much is already known about the consequences of low levels of literacy .The *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development* (OECD) states:

“Literacy is an essential condition for the active and equitable participation of citizens in social, cultural, political and economic life. Participation is the very premise upon which social stability and economic development are based.” (OECD: 97:3)

All societies consider high levels of literacy desirable for their citizens, as a means of sustaining widespread participation in economic and social life. Literacy is important for communication, and is an element in making informed decisions. It is seen as a necessary ingredient for citizenship and community participation.

The OECD report (1997) notes:

“To be literate is to be connected with the language and culture of a society, and to be able to participate in that society's political and economic life.” (OECD, 97:39)

Literacy, it could be said, is therefore a necessity for a healthy society and to ensure social cohesion. The OECD report also indicates that there are *quiet* contributions which literacy makes to the economy and other social benefits, which are not fully appreciated. This can include higher worker productivity, income and government revenues, a better quality of life in terms of reduced poverty, reduced unemployment, reduced crime and public assistance, and improved health and child rearing practices. These contributions are logically connected to literacy in providing the ability to address complex issues. The benefits in investment are, as a result, likely to be enormous. The report goes on to say:

“The net payoffs to investment in valuing literacy, whether private or social, are probably beyond calculation, but they are clearly substantial and manifold.”

The report argues that the knowledge society is having profound social and economic implications, which will impact on the need to develop policies to address skill gaps in every country. Jobs in knowledge societies will require high levels of literacy skill for which demands are expected to increase. The fact that many members of the population are lacking in basic skills is thought to pose problems for both countries and individuals, as well as affecting families and communities. The OECD report argues that differences in the skill profiles of nations have implications for continued economic prosperity, democracy and social cohesion because jobs in knowledge societies require high level of skills. So for reasons not only of economic development, but also social stability, participation in the knowledge society is an imperative. This has implications for policies in ABE and calls for concerted action for solutions to the so called 'literacy problem.'

Key findings from the IALS studies indicate that literacy is strongly associated with economic life chances and well being, and that literacy levels have a link to the employment market and what an adult can do. The report notes (97:18) that low skills are found not just among marginalised groups, but among significant proportions of the adult population, and that adults with low literacy skills do not usually consider that their lack of skills presents them with any difficulties. These findings stress the need for a comprehensive strategy for developing literacy that requires support from governments, employers and social partners, local communities and families.

Improving education services, it is argued, is part of the solution. However, while the IALS results have demonstrated that high educational attainment improves the chances of achieving high literacy, there is no guaranteed correlation. The active use of literacy skills is essential throughout life and this cannot be legislated for, but requires changes in behaviour by individuals and institutions.

'What is needed is the development of a culture committed to learning. Rather than separate development of pre-school, primary, secondary and adult education policies, the research suggests a convergence of policy and practice towards a comprehensive approaches to lifelong learning for all.' (OECD, 97:4)

Increasingly literacy is being connected with concepts of lifelong learning and the report clearly acknowledges the need to fuse the development of thinking on literacy with policies and practices in lifelong learning. The OECD report also suggests an agenda for a new partnership to raise adult literacy levels is necessary. This would include:

'Improving curricula; strengthening incentives to continue learning throughout the life-span; ensuring that measures to improve literacy are built into strategies for community development; building the capacity of employers to create and offer jobs which call on and enhance literacy; and encouraging everyday practice which use literacy skills to the full.' (OECD 97:4)

This agenda has implications far beyond education services, suggesting ABE has a relevance to a broader array of policy domains relating to, for example, youth, senior citizens, employment, welfare programmes, social affairs, health, immigration etc. The OECD report suggests that active and daily practice of skills at work and at home holds the key to successful integration of workers into the employment market. Employers in particular have an important role to play, because of the importance of the work environment in adult learning. To progress, there will also need to be ways of measuring success or failure and of building in performance indicators to measure outcomes and improve performance. This means that not only is there a need to encourage participation, but to build in an agenda for measuring the quality of what is provided.

The OECD (1998) report emphasises that literacy as a powerful determinant of an individual's life chances and quality of life and has a demonstrable effect on the well being of economies and societies. Such a view of literacy is increasingly shaping our understanding of literacy and policies to tackle the so-called *literacy problem*. The first step the report notes is to create a framework of understanding that literacy is important to economic productivity, to health and well being, and to social cohesion in a modern society. It also argues that illiteracy is everyone's concern and that reducing inequalities in opportunity is the key to achieving high literacy 'scores'.

The OECD approach may be characterised as essentially a functional approach which has been criticised as limiting in its conception of literacy, and in failing to recognise the views of learners and their subjective motivations when defining literacy.

Crowther et al; (2001:1) comment:

'The linking of literacy with the economy and the impact of literacy league tables, as constructed by the International Adult Literacy Surveys, have been powerful forces that have shaped the literacy debate and our understanding of the issues involved. The opportunity for thinking about what literacy means and the issues it involves for developing alternative practices has been squeezed out by the demands of government and by global corporations preoccupied with narrowly conceived ideas of human resource development.' *Powerful Literacies*

1.4 The historical context

Literacy is imbued with the power to control, to spread the word, to educate or indoctrinate. Governments have used it as an instrument of socialisation serving the purposes of a dominant ideology which in western industrialised countries is that of the market economy.

There is a deep contrast between archaic or traditional societies, where the idea of universal literacy was irrelevant to forms of work or modes of production, and modern industrial societies, where to be illiterate not only inhibits people's ability to go about their everyday tasks of living, but has a social stigma attached to it. In both cases literacy is linked to power – to the elite in traditional societies and the evolution of new literacy power structures in modern societies, where a lack of literacy skills disenfranchises people from power to make decisions and to change their lives.

A glance across time shows literacy is becoming increasingly specialised, because of the explosion of the information society, and concentrating power in the hands of people who possess specialised literacy in information technology. Consequently, in a society of restricted literacy such as that of medieval times, those to whom literacy was restricted possessed a certain power. In a society where literacy is spread among the masses, literacy per se loses its esoteric power, but the rise of specialised literacies in the hands of specialised groups, brings with it the threat of new divisions developing in society between different groups. While society cannot ensure that everyone possesses the necessary literacy skills to participate in and advance in society, it might be argued it should provide the opportunity for individuals and groups to participate in, succeed and progress if so desired.

Goody (1968) conceives of literacy as having a built in tendency for determinism and attributes to it the development of skills of objectivity, neutrality, speculative thought and logic. He sees a literate people as possessing the capacity for indirect thinking and abstract thought. He distinguishes between people in an oral culture and people in a literate culture. In an oral culture he sees thinking as limited to the immediate and the concrete. Furthermore, Goody considers literacy as essential to the objective recording of events as history, as opposed to the myth, which characterise oral cultures.² Every society represents some 'mix' of oral and 'literary' modes of communication. Even in the so-called 'developed' societies, which claim high literacy rates, people experience a variety of different forms and meanings of written and oral communication, according to aspects of the social context. Goody's deterministic model of literacy has been described as an *autonomous model* of literacy.

Street (1985) put forward an *ideological model*, which places literacy in its social context. In this model, literacy is a culture-bound concept, most meaningfully understood, not in terms of coherent, deterministic, or technical qualities, but in terms of its social context, that is the social practices and conventions of the society of which it is part.

Street (1985) says the autonomous model assumes a '*neutral*' and '*technical*' character for literacy which, he argues, is misconceived and leads to misrepresentations of the actual practice of literacy, whatever the political persuasion of those employing it. He says that an ideological view of literacy-acquisition must reject the *autonomous model* as associated with a capitalist society and the academic sub-culture within it. He also rejects Goody's claim that literacy is closely connected to the development from a traditional to a modern culture. He claims that all such approaches fail to see that even if it were possible to isolate *autonomous* features of literacy, it can only have meaning within a particular social context, and the relationship between what is learned and the ideological and political nature of literacy in practice. He argues that the presentation of literacy as autonomous and neutral, is itself part of an attempt by the ruling groups to assert social control over potentially disruptive lower

orders. He sees schooling and techniques for teaching literacy, which include nothing more than learning to read, as forms of hegemony.

These distinctions in interpretation are important in shaping our understanding of how literacy is acquired and in influencing literacy praxis. An autonomous model is cognitive and skill based whereas an ideological model focuses on the social practices, which influence literacy.

A further problem associated when defining literacy, is the difficulty which exists in obtaining data indicating levels of need, based on agreed definitions, and which can be examined and compared at the national and international levels. Kirsh and Guthrie (1997) claimed that estimates vary from 1% to 20% depending upon one's definition and the particular measures used.

Hamilton et al; (2001:33) criticises the *International Adult Literacy Survey* (IALS), for measuring literacy among an undifferentiated mass of people, whose basic skills needs were identified by experts.

'The assumption made is that people with literacy problems have a deficit that needs to be rectified-primarily because of the needs of the economy. The emphasis is on the huge scale of the problem rather than a fine appreciation of its many dimensions in terms of diverse cultural groups and more nuanced understandings of literacies... the overall impact is an homogenising one that projects an inadequate mass in need of help.'

The problem of definition and measurement in literacy is therefore very real. We must question the assumptions used when defining literacy and whether a definition is even possible.

1.5 Towards an understanding of literacy

All sorts of people talk about literacy and make assumptions about it, both within the education sphere and beyond. The business manager bemoans the lack of literacy skills in the workforce, the politician wants to eradicate the scourge of illiteracy, the radical educator attempts to empower and liberate people, the teacher diagnosis reading difficulties and prescribes a programme to solve them. All have powerful definitions of what literacy is. They have different theories of literacy, different ideas of its problems and what should be done about them.

Part of this current conflict revolves around what is meant by literacy, and to some extent differences of opinion can be viewed as a struggle between different definitions of literacy. The literature about literacy is vast and impressive in its range and a close examination shows that attempts to define literacy range from short-term pragmatic and utilitarian approaches to broad humanitarian ideals. As we shall see later, the way we define literacy is important in influencing decisions about what we are or should be doing and how we evaluate our policies and practices in ABE.

Very few would deny the importance of literacy today, yet it appears to be a multi-dimensional concept, which is difficult to define. Many writers over the years have drawn attention to the lack of agreement over the term. These include Burt (1945), Lewis (1953), Cipolla (1969), Haviland (1973), Bullock (1975), Kirsh and Guthrie (1977), Jones (1977), Cairns (1977), and Thomas (1983), Freire and Macedo (1987) Mace (1992) Barton (1994) and Hamilton (2000). Some interpret literacy simply as the skills necessary to function in society, while other see literacy as related to the social, economic and political context in which human beings find themselves.

As the movement for improving literacy skills began to take hold in the UK, the terms most often used were '*illiterate*', '*semi-literate*' and '*functionally literate*'. The terms *illiterate* and *semi-literate*, were quantified by a 1947 Committee, set up by the Ministry of Education, to examine the extent of illiteracy amongst school leavers and young people. The term *illiterate* was intended to refer to someone whose level of reading ability was less than that of an average seven-year-old in 1938. A *semi-literate* person was defined as someone whose level of reading would be above that of an average 9 year-old child. In 1956, Gray introduced the term *functional literacy* to describe the minimum level of literacy required to function in modern society. Bormuth (1973), in a study of the United States, argued that the reading age of an average 15 year old, was the minimum that was required to gain information from much print material in common use. In 1974, the British Association of Settlements (BAS) published a document entitled *A Right to Read*, which claimed that many examples of writing

found in everyday life in the UK could not be understood by anyone with a reading age below that of an average 13 year-old.

In the 1960s and 70s, the concept of literacy was influenced by a number of theorists, and gradually literacy became to be regarded as much more than the ability to read and write. The World Congress on the *Eradication of Illiteracy* (1965) defined literacy as follows:

'Rather than an end in itself, literacy should be regarded as a way of preparing man for a social, civic and economic role that goes far beyond the limits of rudimentary literacy training consisting mainly in the teaching of reading and writing.'

At the same time in the UK, there emerged what was known as the *great debate in education*, which argued about the purposes of education, and to what extent it should be linked to the needs of the economy. This also led to a parallel debate about the role of literacy in meeting the needs of the economy. Sticht (1975), used the term in a job related context to mean:

'the possession of those literacy skills needed to successfully perform some reading task imposed by an external agent between the reader and a goal the reader wishes to achieve.'

The debate about literacy led researchers in the British National Literacy Campaign, to conclude:

'...the only working definition of an adult sub-literate seems to be someone who knows he is.' Charnley and Jones (1978)

In the 1980s and 90s, the National Children's Bureau and the Adult Basic Skills Unit took up a *self-definition* approach. In 1983, the bureau refused to define the term, pointing out that it was only an adult's assessment of his basic skills, in relation to the demands made upon him by his lifestyle, that could be used as a yardstick for definition.

Thomas (1983) summarised definitions of literacy as a continuum ranging from *basic literacy* at one end to *functional literacy* and *technical literacy* at the other end. Dauzat (1977) claimed that one's definition *'depends upon the point of departure and the intended destination.'*

1.6 Literacy, the individual and society

Van der Kamp and Veendrick (1998) notes a conceptual shift of the conception of literacy in western industrialised countries since the 1960s. He notes a shift away from an ambivalent attitude, towards one where literacy is seen as important issue in society:

'as either a basic human right, a social obligation or a necessary perquisite for economic and social development' (Limage 93:76)

Limage (1993) points out that the mass media tend to personalise illiteracy as being the responsibility of the individual rather than seeing the problem in a social, political or economic dimension. According to Van der Kamp, the discovery of literacy in the 1960s in western industrialised countries was linked to poverty and immigration. Literacy campaigns were linked to emancipation of the poor, and the immigrants were the leading motive of literacy campaigns with a focus on reading and writing. The publications of non-governmental organisations and other social movements describe the isolation, hopelessness and the sense of shame which people with no education, including immigrants, experienced. He sees illiterates as marginalised in society, either because of their social status, or because of their successfully hidden semi-literacy or illiteracy.

'Illiteracy is only one factor in a whole range of disadvantages in their daily life. Thus the image of the single-parent family, drug or alcohol abuse, wife-battering juvenile delinquency and so forth are all inter-twined in the classic portrait of the impoverished illiterate.' (Van der Kamp 98:98)

1.7 Literacy and the economic imperative

The concept of functional literacy has developed as a result of researchers revealing that a considerable percentage of the population could not read or write effectively and was introduced to define the skills needed in daily life contexts. In the 90s the concept has been redefined to include not only the ability to read and write, but to be able to do so with increased competence. It has a modern requirement with origins in economic and social changes, and the shift to knowledge-dependent, information-based economies.

In the UK, the *Basic Skills Agency* has adopted a functionalist approach to defining literacy. It defines literacy as the skills necessary to function in everyday life:

'the ability to communicate by talking and listening, reading, writing, and using maths through a range of media and technologies to enhance participation in everyday life.' (BSU:2000)

The *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development* (1996) has also adopted a functionalist approach to definition. It defines literacy as :

'using printed information to function in society in order to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential'.

The functional view of literacy refers to a set of skills necessary to function in society. Literacy becomes a set of technical skills which people can be said to be competent in, for working and functioning in society. The skills are functionally focussed and usually linked with low level qualifications.

Functional literacy is often now linked to concerns about developing skills and economic performance for a new global economy (OECD: 1992). Literacy is seen as the means by which governments can improve their competitive edge by filling skills gaps, which require certain levels of literacy. Literacy becomes closely linked to enhancing skill levels of the workforce. The new emphasis on '*skills*' as a major factor of competitiveness played a key role in propelling the issue to the fore of policy debate. A problem with this model is determining the agreed level one must attain before being deemed literate. This view of literacy has become the common way to think about literacy at the moment and the emphasis is on standardising literacy accomplishments, tests, core skills, and uniform learning outcomes specified in advance of the learning process.

'People are ranked from bottom to top with emphasis on what they can't do rather than what they can. This leads to a deficit model where those on the bottom rungs are positioned as lacking the skills they need. The frameworks used to define this ladder are top-down ones constructed largely in terms of pre-vocational and vocationally relevant literacy requirements.'
Crowther et al; in *Powerful Literacies* (2001:2)

Crowther et al; (2001:2) see a problem with this approach:

'They do not recognise the validity of people's own definitions, uses and aspirations for literacy so they are disempowering in the sense that they are not negotiable or learner centered and not locally responsive.'

1.8 Radical views of literacy

In the 70s and 80s a radical understanding of literacy began to emerge. This new understanding was influenced by the writings of Paulo Freire, who saw literacy as a liberating force, which went far beyond training people for work, and encouraged critical thinking about the conditions adults found themselves in. The radical view of literacy sees it as embedded in social and cultural practices rather than being simply a technology. To be literate is said to be continually '*reading*' one's world, understanding social, cultural and political aspects, and transforming one's relationship to it. Literacy is interpreted as being embedded in citizenship and having a political dimension.

'Literacy is best understood as a myriad of discursive forms and cultural competencies that construct and make available the various relations and experiences that exist between learners and the world...literacy becomes synonymous with conventional discourse and dominant social relations. It means developing the theoretical and practical conditions through which human beings can locate themselves in their own histories and in doing so make themselves present as agents in the struggle to expand the possibilities of human life and freedom... To be literate is not to be free, it is to be present and active in the struggle for reclaiming one's voice, history and future literacy provides an essential precondition for organising and understanding the socially constructed nature of subjectivity and experience and for assessing how knowledge, power and social practice can be collectively forged in the service of making decisions instrumental to a democratic society rather than merely consenting to the wishes of the rich and powerful.' (Freire and Macedo, 1987)

Freire also speaks about *conscientisation*, which refers to the process in which people act not as recipients but as knowing subjects, achieving a deepening awareness both of the socio-cultural reality which shapes their lives, and their capacity to transform that reality. (Jarvis 91:270) Conscientisation thus implies not just the awareness of being oppressed (passive consciousness) but a *'taking possession of reality by demythologising it and acting upon it.'* (Collins 72:65). The outcome of the process should be praxis, the combination of reflection and action in the learners world. For Freire, conscientisation is an unending process, since the new reality created becomes in turn the object of a new reflection.

Most of Freire's writings focus on literacy education, which is not surprising considering the context of mass illiteracy in which he wrote. He claims that neither literacy nor post-literacy education are separate processes, but they are two moments in the same process of formation (Freire: 78:100). For Freire, the major aim of education is to help the participants to put *knowledge into practice* and it is this combination of *reflection* and *action*, that he calls *praxis*. By putting education into practice it is made liberating.

The ideas of Freire were concerned with the development and liberation of people. He sees education as one way by which individuals can acquire confidence as human beings. He recognises that the dominated and the dominant are in their different ways imprisoned within the structures of society, and both need to be liberated. People are central to his thinking and he sees the achievement of *humanisation* as both an educational and a political act. For Freire and Macedo the acquisition of literacy is much more than mechanical and psychological domination of reading and writing techniques. Rather it is about empowerment and transformation.

Criticism of Freire's work have centred around the view that it came out of a third world situation which does not have validity for the remainder of the world. Speaking about Freire's approach, Giroux (1981:139) writes:

'It would be misleading as well as dangerous to extend without qualification Freire's theory and method to the industrialised and urbanised societies of the west.'

Others have argued that Freire's approach, offers a theory for teaching and learning which is at the heart of good adult education practice. The context within which he places his approach to education, which has political implications as well as human ones, causes some educators concern. Freire was fundamentally concerned with the needs and aspirations of the oppressed. The extent to which educators consider adults with literacy needs as oppressed in a modern industrial state may well determine to what extent they feel that his pedagogy has relevance.

1.9 Literacy in everyday life and the new literacy studies

A new paradigm shift in the study of literacy in contemporary society has emerged in the 90s which has been influenced by research into adult education in everyday life. Olesen (89:47) highlights the fact that experiences and learning processes do not primarily take place within the framework of institutional education and culture.

'It is the subjective learning of the whole of immediate daily life, and the individual and collective development of feelings, consciousness, and patterns of action that belong there.'

The new approach to studying literacy is known as the *new literacy studies*. In its practice has been at the forefront of undermining the conceptual adequacy of the discourse of deficit. Street (1996), Barton (1994), and Barton and Hamilton (1998) describe this new approach which sets out from a different starting point, emphasising the local, everyday life experience of literacy in communities of practice.

"The first starting-point is people's everyday lives and how they make use of reading and writing in going about their ordinary daily life, people to-day are constantly encountering literacy" Barton (94:3)

What is different about this approach, is the focus it puts on what people have rather than what they lack, what motivates them rather than something they need. It is based on the belief that literacy has meaning within its particular context of social practice. It recognises the many different ways that people engage with literacy, recognising difference and diversity, and challenging how these differences are valued within our society. It recognises different literacy practices in different domains of social life, such as education, religion, workplaces, public services, families, community activities etc; they change over time and these different literacies are supported and shaped by different institutions and social relationships.

Crowther et al (2001:2) argues that any research that seeks to increase our understanding of literacy in society must take account of these meanings, values and uses. The new literacy studies dispenses with the idea that there is a single literacy that can be taken for granted.

'We have to begin to think in pluralist terms about the variety of literacies that are used in different contexts in order to make meaning and in order to make literacy practice meaningful to people.'
Crowther et al(2001:2)

The *new literacy studies* represent a shift from a psychological or cognitive model of literacy as a set of skills, to one which includes the socio-cultural practices associated with reading and writing. This approach advocates a new understanding of what is included when talking about literacy. It suggests that we should look beyond texts themselves, to what people do with literacy, with whom, where, and how. It suggests we focus attention on the cultural practices within which the written word is embedded and the ways in which texts are socially regulated and used. It leads us to consider the differentiated uses of literacy in varying cultural contexts and to consider not just print literacy, but other mass media, including visual and oral ways of communicating and the way use of these media, (using both old print and new electronic technologies) is inter-linked. Writing becomes as central as reading, and other ways of interacting with print culture are identified.

The *new literacies studies* involves looking beyond educational settings to vernacular practices and informal learning, and to all kinds of other settings in which *literacies* play a key role. Learning does not just take place in classrooms and is not just concerned with methods.

Hamilton (00:34) distinguishes between *dominant or institutional literacies* and *vernacular literacies*. The former, she defines as those which are associated with formal organisations, such as those of the school, the church the work-place, the legal system, commerce, medical and welfare bureaucracies. Here there are professional experts and teachers through whom access to knowledge is controlled. These are part of a specialised discourses of bounded communities of practice, and are standardised and defined in terms of the formal purposes of the institution, rather than in terms of the multiple and shifting purposes of individual citizens and their communities. She also notes the need to also describe the learning that takes place outside of formal institutions. These she calls *vernacular literacies* which have their origin in the purposes of everyday life. They are not highly valued by formal social institutions though sometimes they develop in response to these institutions. They can be contrasted with dominant literacies, which are seen as rational and of high cultural value. They might involve becoming an expert in a range of everyday activities concerned with organising life, personal communication, private leisure, documenting life, making sense of things, and social participation. What is different about vernacular literacy practices, is that they are learned informally in homes and neighbourhood groups, through the everyday perplexities and curiosities of our lives. The roles of novice or learner and expert or teacher are not fixed, but shift from context to context and there is an acceptance that people will engage in vernacular literacies in different ways, sometimes supporting,

sometimes requiring support from others. Identities shift accordingly, they are rooted in action contexts and everyday purposes and networks, they are integrated in everyday activities, for example, paying the bills or organising a community event. Literacy itself is not a focus of attention, but is used to get other things done. Everyday literacies are subservient to the goals of purposeful activities and are defined by people in terms of these activities.

The acknowledgement of the multiplicity of literacies which exists implies that definitions of ABE are shifting. Our traditional way of measuring participation, through successfully engaging in formal learning environments, for example, by taking a course in a college or training centre, is being challenged by new ideas about how adults learn through informal approaches in the community.

These ideas will obviously impact on how we measure participation and success. The legitimisation of new forms of learning requires us to think creatively about new ways of measuring success. This research study acknowledges learning may take place in different learning environments and the quality framework that is developed is designed with input from those working and learning in a variety of learning environments. It is hoped that its flexible structure will enable it to have relevance in very different situations.

Another implication of shifts in understanding about literacy is that it places people's own definitions of literacy at the centre, because there is no one standard that is valid for everyone for all time. This means that we must begin by exploring the learners starting points and their assumptions about literacy.

1.10 Overview

In sum, then, the *new literacy studies* are taking the understanding of literacy forward by encouraging reflection about everyday practices that everyone is part of. It is also encouraging us to ask questions about literacy, rather than assuming we already know what it is. This chapter has traced the development of the concept of literacy to the present day. It has shown that literacy is a complex concept, which is difficult to define, and there is no universally agreed conceptualisation. Furthermore, our understanding of literacy is always changing as new challenges to our understanding emerge. If we do not have a clear idea about what literacy is, and if we do not have agreement about its aims and goals, then it will be difficult if not impossible to talk about how we measure success.

In *Chapter 2*, I will examine the changing context of literacy practice and how the quality debate is influencing practice in Northern Ireland.

¹ These studies have become known as *the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALAS)*. A large sample of adults (ranging from 1500 to 8000 per country) in the USA, Canada, Germany, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland and the Netherlands were given the same wide-ranging tests of their literacy skills during the autumn of 1994. The study was later extended to include 25 countries, and included the UK, Denmark and Ireland. The study was aimed at encouraging the development of policies to raise basic skill levels. The countries included in the report represented approximately 7% of the world population and 55% of world GDP.

² Goody further attributes to literacy storage of a society's cultural repertoire in a permanent way not possible in an oral culture. But this is to ignore the fact that oral cultures make use of memories, remembrances and ritual to ensure cultural continuity. The Celts, for instance, had no knowledge of writing until Roman times yet an enormous amount of detailed knowledge about religion, history and laws was preserved and passed on from generation to generation. This was made possible because they had a specialist class of learned men or '*Fili*' who, being poets and intellectuals, had the job of memorising and transmitting the cultural heritage to future generations. In addition, there were the poets or '*bardi*' who were employed by clan chiefs to compose poems and memorise genealogies.

These men existed as long as the clan system itself only going out of existence in the 18th Century. The ‘*seanachaidi*’, or recites of tales, survived into the 20th century. It could therefore be argued that Goody understates the qualities of oral communication, polarising the difference between oral and literate modes of communication in a way that gives insufficient credit to the reality of ‘*mixed*’ modes of interaction.

Chapter 2: The Context of Adult Basic Education in Northern Ireland

‘Tackling poor basic skills is one of the key priorities of the lifelong learning agenda’.

Lifelong Learning: A New Learning Culture for All, Department of Education for Northern Ireland (1999).

‘I am strongly of the view that tackling poor basic skills is a key priority for our economy and for the good of society. The findings of the International Adult Literacy Survey confirmed the view that this is a serious problem for Northern Ireland. It will require urgent action by Government and by the main players in the field to overcome the problem in the interests of economic progress and social inclusion.’

Sean Farren, Minister for the Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment for Northern Ireland commenting in the Basic Skills Unit Report. (00:2)

This chapter examines the emerging context of literacy education provision in Northern Ireland. It traces the development of literacy policy, linking it to the political debate in the UK. Policy in Northern Ireland has been greatly influenced by the debate about literacy in Great Britain and provision is designed to meet need as perceived by government. A plethora of provision has developed, and the growth and development of this provision is more and more shaped by the demands of the labour market that requires a basic education. It also shows how quality has emerged as a response to a perceived need to standardise the curriculum, introduce qualifications and ensure consistency of provision.

2.1 The emergence of the literacy question in the UK

Awareness about the problem of illiteracy in the UK can be traced back to the 1960’s. Before the 1970s, the general belief in the UK was that a hundred years of universal free elementary education had almost eradicated the problem of illiteracy. So it was assumed that people possessed the necessary literacy skills to function in society.

In 1974, the publication by the British Association of Settlement and Social Action Centres of a pamphlet entitled *A Right to Read* (1974) caused shock waves in educational circles, by claiming that two million adults lacked basic literacy.¹ As a result of these startling figures, a nation-wide adult literacy campaign was launched in 1975. The British Broadcasting Corporation (the BBC), broadcast a series of information and instructional television programmes entitled *On the Move*, aimed at adult non-readers. The large scale deployment of volunteers as tutors introduced a new phenomenon into British education, the non-paid teacher or *volunteer tutor*, who worked alongside professionals to provide literacy tuition within the framework of local provision. Local organisers were appointed on a part-time basis to interview and assess the needs of adults referred to them by administrative officers. So the first literacy tutors and organisers (paid and voluntary) began to emerge.

In the 1980’s, a report prepared by the National Children’s Bureau (1983), represented a further attempt to define the extent of the need for literacy tuition amongst adults. It revealed that one in ten of the interviewees admitted to have problems with reading, writing and spelling since leaving school – 12% of men compared with 7% of women had had such problems. Twenty-nine percent of those who stated that they had literacy problems since leaving school admitted that these caused them difficulties in everyday life.

In 1991 the *Basic Skills Agency* estimated that up to one adults in five, or seven million people, are not functionally literate (that is unable to function effectively at a basic level of literacy). The Basic Skills Agency report *Older and Younger* (BSA: 96:4), also noted that findings from successive research into the extent of need for ABE in the UK, suggests a number of people have very real difficulties with basic literacy and do not have a level of competence sufficient to meet the changing demands and requirements of the modern world. The report (96:3) comments:

'Unless we can raise standards and reduce the number of people who have very serious difficulties with skills most of us take for granted, we will continue to waste the potential of a significant number of our fellow citizens'.

Another Basic Skills Agency report *'It Doesn't Get any Better'* (1997), suggested that problems with basic skills have a continuing adverse effect on people's lives. The report gave a stark picture of disadvantage in the labour market. The report suggests that less than 20% of those with literacy problems have been to a class to improve their literacy. The *Moser Report* (1999) added further to the debate about literacy and the needs of the economy by claiming that poor literacy was one of the reasons for relatively low productivity.

So, from the end of the Second World War, a growing recognition of literacy issues is discernible and this led to successive attempts to quantify the extent of the literacy problem. While no agreement may have been reached on the actual size of the problem, the focus on the literacy question did lead to the development of a growing awareness of the problem, particularly its effects on individuals and their ability to contribute to the labour market.

2.2 The development of literacy provision in Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, literacy provision for adults can be traced back to the mid 1950's. It was, however, only after the screening of the BBC television programme *On the Move*, first transmitted in 1975, that a greater emphasis was given to developing provision for the basic learning needs of adults. An *Adult Literacy Liaison Group* was formed, to plan and advise on provision. This committee was chaired by the Department of Education for Northern Ireland, and brought together representatives from the voluntary and statutory sector. These included the Province's colleges of Further Education, representation from the voluntary sectors, the WEA (the *Workers' Educational Association*), EGSA (the *Educational Guidance Service for Adults*), the BBC, and representatives from the local education inspectorate (the *Department of Education for Northern Ireland*). The *Adult Literacy Liaison group*, stimulated by the BBC programmes, initially operated as an ad-hoc group. Later this liaison group was to operate under the auspices of the *Northern Ireland Council for Continuing Education (NICCE)*, and became known as the *Adult Literacy and Basic Education Committee (ALBEC)*. In the 1980s ALBEC commissioned a report on ABE, which recommended that a *Regional Adult Basic Education Unit* should be established, with its own full-time specialist staff. Following the publication of this report, the Department of Education agreed to fund the secondment of an experienced Adult Basic Education tutor to a regional curriculum base, which had been established at one of the universities.²

When in 1988, NICEE was suspended, the *Department of Education* agreed that ALBEC should continue on an interim basis, eventually forming a sub-committee of a newly established body established in 1993. This new body was called the *Northern Ireland Council for Adult Education (NICAE)*, and ALBEC became a committee of this Council. The Council's aims were:

'To enhance personal and job skills among adults through greater participation in an extended range and quality of adult education across Northern Ireland.'

The terms of reference for the *Adult Literacy and Basic Education Committee (ALBEC)* were to promote, encourage and review all aspects of ABE, to maintain links with bodies with similar interests in the UK and Ireland, and to promote quality standards in the delivery of ABE. ALBEC continued to offer a focus for the common interests of ABE providers and support agencies, and its committee included representatives from the formal and non-formal sectors.³

Many of those involved in the provision of literacy programmes benefited from the activities of ALBEC. ALBEC provided support to tutors by preparing manuals and student reading texts based on local contexts and the writings of students in ABE. Conferences, training programmes and a consultancy and advice facility were some of the ways in which ALBEC contributed to the local development of ABE. ALBEC also acted as an advocate for promoting more ABE provision, and for highlighting what already had been achieved. The impact of ALBEC was however limited. This was in part due to the fact that ALBEC simply represented the interests of a group of committed professionals who relied on a minimal financial

support from the *Department of Education* to develop their ideas, and to respond to the expressed needs of tutors and learners. ALBEC was therefore mainly a talking shop, where the goals of literacy and the steps necessary to achieve these goals in Northern Ireland, were discussed. These ideas were only partly realised through the organisation of a very limited number of activities in ABE. Perhaps their greatest achievement was to act as a pressure group on Government to take the necessary steps to provide for the co-ordination of ABE in Northern Ireland. This pressure led to the setting up of the Basic Skills Unit for Northern Ireland in 1999.

The need to provide support for ABE was recognised by the *Department of Education for Northern Ireland* in its lifelong learning strategy report, (DENI: 99:3):

'To promote new initiatives in access to adult basic education and to enhance the quality of provision in the field as part of an ambitious action plan which has been set for Northern Ireland'

The report also noted the importance of establishing a co-ordinating body for ABE:

'In order to respond actively to the dearth of basic skills among a large number of adults, to promote access to adult basic education, and enhance the competence of adults to use IT, as well as improving the quality of provision in basic skills, the Government intends to set up a Basic Skills Unit, to support a range of initiatives.' (99:46):

The *Basic Skills Unit's* remit was to act as an advocacy and advisory body to promote and develop quality provision in ABE, to raise awareness and ownership among as wide a range of groups as possible, and to support community-based organisations providing ABE. The specific tasks of the unit would be to act as an advocacy and advisory body disseminating exemplars of good practice, providing advice and support, encourage innovation by providing funding and expertise, increasing research and pilot projects in ABE, providing quality resources and materials for ABE, and advising government bodies. The unit would raise awareness among as wide a public as possible about issues relating to basic education, encourage co-operation with other agencies and government departments and fund community groups for activities related to ABE.

With the establishment of a new *Basic Skills Unit* in 1999, the ALBEC committee became defunct. In order to fulfil its functions, the newly established unit has appointed a team of full-time staff to meet the ABE agenda set out by government. The first tasks of the new unit have been to develop links with providers, promote links with national and international bodies and meeting the training and development needs of key staff. *Raising Our Sights* (BSU: 2000), the first policy document of this new unit, represents an attempt to raise ABE as a key priority of the newly established Northern Ireland government.

Government responses over the past twenty years have demonstrated an understanding by government of the need to raise the profile of ABE, and to respond to the demands of the job market. Effective responses to setting up systems to co-ordinate policy in Northern Ireland have been rather slow to develop, but recently this has taken on greater importance.

2.3 Emerging policy on literacy and lifelong learning in the UK

We have seen how illiteracy has been relatively low-key in policy discussion on education until relatively recently in Northern Ireland. Recently, the emergence of a debate about widening participation in education has heightened interest in ABE. The focus on a need to promote an education strategy for lifelong learning has revived discussion about the value of ABE and has led to a new concern to develop effective policies and practices for ABE. This discussion has been linked not just to the debate about getting more adults involved in education, but to providing for the job related needs of adults with ABE difficulties and to meeting the skills needs of the economy. The debate has also been partly concerned with the issues of social inclusion and about individual needs of citizens and their happiness.

The UK Government's Green paper, *'The Learning Age: A Renaissance for a New Britain'* (98:10) sets out the policy agenda for lifelong learning to create a culture where continued lifelong learning is the normal

The document emphasises the need for a clear vision of the specific and unique contribution that the tertiary sector can make by giving people the skills needed in a modern economy and society. It suggests the need for a vision for education to advance knowledge, to enhance individual learning and skills and to enrich the intellectual, economic, social and cultural life of society and the community. (99:24)

It also mentions the need for creating a culture of lifelong learning through promoting wider access to educational opportunity for those previously under-represented, and by equipping them to progress through the education system. It stresses the need to ensure that provision is closely matched to local and regional skill needs by finding appropriate responses to the low level of basic skills. The document also mentions the need to promote learning, training and scholarship of the highest quality to develop a more coherent regional structure for planning, administration and delivery of education and training. It notes, for example, a need to improve retention and attainment levels, to measure and publish meaningful information on performance, to enhance the skills and competencies of teaching and other support staff, to enhance the quality of the learning experience of students, and to improve management information systems. It also emphasises the need to develop collaborative mechanisms, which will encourage the development of a network of training providers, greater co-operation between voluntary and community sector providers, and engagement with local business and industry.

These reports express common goals. They acknowledge the need to widen access to education and to promote equality. However, there is no clear guidance on how this might be achieved in ABE policy and practice. The reports emphasise the role of government and those involved in planning and delivering quality of services to improving practice, but there is little acknowledgement of the importance of learner centred approaches in achieving goals. Rather the impact of globalisation and the demand for skills to meet the needs of a growing economy, are seen as the driving force behind the new basic skills approach. Better skilled and more adaptable employees are seen as the primary outcome of new policies and practices in ABE. The acquisition of qualifications is also seen as central to meeting the needs of the labour market and as a measure of quality. Yet there is little reported evidence of the desire of learners to obtain qualifications.

The importance of quality provision in ABE is also acknowledged and an agenda for improving practice is recommended. The model for measuring quality is clearly seen as one that is developed by government and officialdom in consultation with other stakeholders, rather than one which is user focused or which might emerge from a consensus building approach to defining or measuring quality. It is therefore essentially a *top down approach*, which measure success in relation to a given set of pre-determined indicators, and which ranks provision from best to worst.

2.4 Who provides adult basic education?

ABE provision in Northern Ireland spans both the formal and non-formal sectors of education. However, given that it has only very recently become a central policy issue in Northern Ireland, it is hardly surprising that provision to meet the needs of adults is sparse and patchy.

Formal provision is by far the most easily recognisable and is provided through a number of colleges of Further Education, training organisations and open learning centres located all over Northern Ireland. Non-formal provision, or that which is provided by the community and voluntary sector, is an ever-increasing sector of provision. Provision in the formal sector tends to be institutionally based and focussed on functional literacy skills, particularly reading and writing skills.

In contrast, provision in the voluntary and community sector has been linked to wider social and community issues. ABE being seen as connected to a wider community development approach where knowledge and skills are related to personal and community issues. For example, the organisations of local activities such as a community cafe, community newspaper, dampness campaign, or mother and toddler group, may lead to incidental learning, which in turn enhances the ABE skills of an individual through writing a report or letter, or giving a speech etc.

pattern and it acknowledges this *'encompasses basic literacy to advanced scholarships.'* The report acknowledges the importance of learning for economic development, and also puts great emphasis on the rights of individuals to learn for excitement, discovery and for developing the mind. It acknowledges that learning contributes to social cohesion and fosters a sense of belonging, responsibility and identity in communities, affected by rapid economic change and industrial restructuring.

Learning Works (1997), better known as the Kennedy Report on widening participation in Further Education, took up a similar theme. The document contains a persuasive statement that learning is the key to economic prosperity and social cohesion. It invokes the principle of *equity* in addition to the utilitarian arguments for widening participation. It condemns the inadequacy of existing policies, which have encouraged a growth in numbers in education, but failed to include those who experience social and economic disadvantage most.

Lifelong Learning: a New Learning Culture for All (99:1), sets out a rationale for lifelong learning in Northern Ireland, based on the *Learning Age* definition of lifelong learning as *'the continuous development of skills, knowledge and understanding that are essential for employability and fulfilment.'* The paper outlines a set of interlocking proposals, aimed at creating a culture where continued lifelong learning is the normal pattern. It stresses the importance of increasing general skill levels to improve international competitiveness, enabling individuals of all ages, background and abilities to enhance their employability in a rapidly changing economy, and the importance of encouraging individual self-fulfilment. The report emphasises the importance of increasing adult participation significantly in all aspects of education from groups previously underrepresented, and emphasises the role of basic skills work in this process. The document stresses the importance of lifelong learning for economic development and for healing divisions in society.

'Lifelong learning can make a major contribution to economic development and to healing the divisions that exist in society. It will contribute to social cohesion, help communities to respond to social and economic change, and help to address the problems of exclusion among those in our society who, for one reason or another, feel isolated or disaffected.' (99:2)

Commenting on the contribution that lifelong learning can make in providing for the basic skills needs of adults, the document (99:2) says:

'if the basic skills of Northern Ireland's people as a whole are to be raised to equal those in other countries, if individuals are to be given the opportunities for personal development and communities are to be helped to respond to social and economic change, then it is essential to create a new learning culture for all where people regard acquiring new skills or updating their existing ones as part of everyday life....'

The report continues (99:47):

'A failure to address the major basic skills problem would not only affect the life of an individual, but would have a knock-on effect on the economy and the social fabric of our society.'

The DENI report (1999:47) also notes:

'Raising of standards in literacy, numeracy and basic IT can only be achieved through partnership between Government, employers, education and training providers, and key community and voluntary organisations.'

'Learning for Tomorrow's World: Towards a New Strategic Plan for Education Services in Northern Ireland 2000-2006' is another policy consultation document which notes the importance of increasing participation in adult education, particularly literacy provision and in developing quality provision. The report comments (99:13):

'There remains a specific adult literacy problem in Northern Ireland. Improving basic skills of literacy, numeracy and information technology will thus be key components of the lifelong learning programme.'

Seventeen further and higher education colleges are the main providers of ABE programmes in Northern Ireland. Each college has someone responsible for ABE, usually known as a co-ordinator or tutor organiser, who is responsible for organising and managing provision. Teams of college tutors and volunteer tutors undertake the majority of teaching. Organisers and college tutors usually have qualifications in ABE and/or adult education and an emphasis is placed on providing similar training for the volunteer tutors. Recent research (BSU: 2000) has revealed that 80% of ABE learners were in college provision.

The employment-training sector has also a responsibility to provide training in basic skills for adults involved in Government training schemes. These programmes seek to improve basic skills, by developing basic computer awareness, and by undertaking intensive employment-related placements. The Basic Skills Unit report (00:4) indicates that 6% of students participating in ABE are in employment training programmes. A further 7% of training in ABE, it says, exists in other employment related programmes.

Other providers of ABE in the formal sector, include public service bodies such as the Department of Health and Social Services. The *Health and Social Services Boards*, Trusts have around forty day centres throughout Northern Ireland, catering mainly for people with mental and/or physical special needs. Very often the centres employ staff with a specific responsibility for ABE.

Much of the rest of ABE provision is located within voluntary and community bodies. The Basic Skills Unit (00:4) notes the difficulties in ascertaining participation rates within the voluntary and community sector, due to unstable funding cycles. The report quotes local research (BSU: 00:9) which shows that some 51 dedicated providers in Northern Ireland were involved in delivery of ABE during the year 1999-2000. Groups were reported to be providing both one-to-one tuition and programme-based initiatives. For example, the *Workers' Education Association's 'Return to Learn'* provision,⁴ caters for adults with ABE needs. In its development plan the WEA specifies that the content of these courses promote: study skills, communication skills, confidence building and understanding the world of education. Classes are provided in literacy skills, assertiveness, and personal development and effectiveness.

The BSU research⁵ also indicated that of 1,700 workplaces surveyed in Northern Ireland, some 71% of employers did not offer basic skills training. This implies that very few employers are aware of the benefits of improved literacy skills in the workforce, or their responsibility in improving ABE skills.

Tutors who are employed part-time provide much of the teaching in ABE. In a study of ABE provision in Northern Ireland conducted by the *Scottish Council for Research in Education* (94:40), Mark et al; noted that:

'Most adult basic education teaching is done by part-time and voluntary tutors whose level of relevant qualification is comparatively low compared with full time staff.'

This means that staff are often marginalised from organisational structures, and have very little opportunity to influence management and curriculum decisions. Because staff are employed part-time, tutors tend to come from certain types of groups - tutors who have another job as their primary source of income, who are retired, or who are only interested in part-time work-for example, those with full time child raising responsibilities. This is unfortunate, as it means that learners are taught by staff who do not have access to or are unable to avail themselves of appropriate training, or who are removed from the educational decision making process in ABE. Adults are therefore taught by tutors who have received very little training for the job.

2.5 The extent of need in Northern Ireland

The *International Adult Literacy Survey* (IALS) survey, mentioned earlier, is the most recent attempt to define the extent of illiteracy in an international context. The survey was the first ever survey of levels of adults literacy needs, using a national random probability sample of adults of working age, and was carried out in Northern Ireland in 1996 as part of an international programme of surveys. The IALS survey was also carried out in twenty other countries. This survey set out to profile the literacy ability of adults aged 16-65, using an internationally agreed measurement instrument and survey implementation protocol.

IALS defined literacy as a broad range of skills required in a varied range of contexts. 'Using printed or written information to function in society to achieve one's goal and to develop one's knowledge and potential.' (IALS: 96:2) This definition defines literacy as a broad range of skills required for a varied range of contexts and did not define it as something which people either have or do not have. The survey measured performance on a prose document and quantitative literacy scale.⁵ The IALS Survey (1996) highlighted the extent of need for ABE in Northern Ireland, with an estimated 24% of adults aged 16-65 performing at a basic level on the prose literacy scale. The figures in Northern Ireland were generally found to be much higher than in other European countries, with the exception of Poland. Comparable figures for other countries were 8% in Sweden, 9% in Denmark, 11% in the Netherlands, 14% in Germany, 17% in Canada, 17% in Australia, 18% in Belgium, 22% in Great Britain, 23% in the Republic of Ireland, and 43% in Poland. The Basic Skills Unit baseline study (2000) reported a very high level of need for ABE and a dearth of provision to meet this need in Northern Ireland.⁶ In its first report on ABE in Northern Ireland, the *Basic Skills Unit* (2000) indicated the need to *Raise Our Sights* to make ABE a key priority for everyone in Northern Ireland. The report (BSU 00:2) notes that adults with ABE problems are by no means a homogenous group and are engaged in a range of everyday life activities. A number of general trends emerged from the IALS study level one scale. *Raising Our Sights* (00:2) quotes the IALS study in Northern Ireland as finding that:

'Those adults most likely to perform at level one were in the lowest income brackets, in receipt of social security benefits, unemployed and with lower levels of educational attainment.'

Research by the *Basic Skills Agency for England and Wales* reported by the Basic Skills Unit (00:2) found that there is a range of different abilities for those with adults performing at level one. Some adults' skills are rusty, others will benefit from intensive training to enable them to meet their learning goals. The BSA estimates that four in ten of the adults with basic skills needs require specialist and skilled tuition.

What is clear is that a variety of approaches and better access to learning opportunities will be necessary to meet the needs of the 24% of adults in Northern Ireland with ABE difficulties.

The extent of need, as demonstrated by the International literacy Survey, prompted Sir Claus Moser to conclude (99:3):

'There simply is not enough provision of study programmes to meet the need. Nor has there been a coherent and consistent set of national standards to guarantee quality in what is taught, how it is taught and in the qualifications that are awarded at the end. Most of the teachers are part-time with little access to training and the system of inspection needs co-ordination.'

The report goes on to say that:

'There are inevitably problems of motivating any prospective learners... this is partly because people with difficulties are often understandably reluctant to acknowledge or are unaware that they have a problem; or that it matters or indeed that there are ways of tackling it...programmes of study are insufficiently publicised, and are often not accessible enough to encourage potential learners to take part.'

Moser goes on to stress the need for a *national strategy* for ABE. Such a strategy, he says, should contain national targets, an entitlement to learn, guidance, assessment and publicity, better learning opportunities, a new curriculum, a new system of qualifications, teacher training, improved inspection, the benefits of new technology, and the planning of delivery in ABE.

2.6 The emergence of the quality debate

In recent years quality has begun to emerge as a major issue in ABE. While few dispute the need for evaluation, accepting it as a necessary factor in ensuring provision that meets the needs of learners, pressures of time and money have militated against conducting systematic evaluations.

The need to provide a very different type of educational experience in ABE, with programmes tailored to meet each individual need, has made comparability with measures of other educational programmes difficult. The need to convey the full richness and diversity of the educational experience in ABE has led to calls for subject specific indicators and for suitably designed instruments to be developed to collect the necessary data.

In 1992 the *Basic Skills Agency* for England and Wales introduced a quality mark for ABE programmes. This mark focussed on a minimum entitlement i.e. what everyone joining a basic skills programme should expect to get, and many programmes and schemes have gained this quality mark. From 1998, this quality mark was revised to include effectiveness as well as entitlement, and any organisation running a basic skills programme (for example Colleges of Further Education, training providers, voluntary and community organisations, public and private sector companies, local councils, prisons) could apply for this quality mark.

In Northern Ireland, the Department of Education (DENI) and the Training and Employment Agency (T&EA) together have responsibility for external monitoring of ABE throughout the statutory sector in Northern Ireland. The DENI published its approach to quality assurance in Further Education (FE) in *Improving Quality: Raising Standards* (1998) and for the training sector in *Improving Quality: Raising Standards* (1999). Its policy is to promote an internal and an external dimension to the assessment of quality with emphasis on both quantitative and qualitative indicators. These are general standards for measuring quality in education, and so do not have a specific ABE focus. There is also no provision for applying the standards to other providers of ABE: the voluntary and community sector, the health and social care sector, the prisons etc; are not subject to such monitoring procedures.

The need to encourage a wider debate among the very many providers of ABE and to develop agreed approaches to measuring quality has been widely recognised. We have seen how the co-ordinating bodies for ABE in Northern Ireland, set up since the 1980's, have all had a remit to encourage the development of high standards of provision. However the absence of any real power to change things has tended to mean the discussion about quality has remained in the *ideal* realm and there has been minimal engagement in the quality debate between these bodies and the stakeholders.

More recently there is evidence to suggest this is changing. The need to sustain and improve the quality of provision is recognised as one of the key aims of the policy document '*Lifelong Learning: A New Learning Culture for All.*' (99:53). The report talks about the need for resources to be allocated appropriately and managed effectively and efficiently to ensure good value for money. It also singles out poor basic skills as one of the key priorities of the lifelong learning agenda, and the need for its new Basic Skills Unit to:

'act as an advocacy and advisory body to promote and develop quality provision in basic skills education among adults.' (99:46)

This creates a new opportunity to enable a debate about the development and monitoring of standards between stakeholders in Northern Ireland to take place. The role of the co-ordinating body in facilitating the development of this process remains to be tested.

The *Moser Report* (1999) has also added to the debate about quality. It concluded (99:10):

'There simply is not enough provision of study programmes to meet the need. Nor has there been a coherent and consistent set of national standards to guarantee quality in what is taught, how it is taught and in the qualifications that are awarded at the end. Most of the teachers are part-time with little access to training and the system of inspection needs co-ordination.'

The report identified a lack of clarity, coherence and consistency in what adults are currently offered tracing this back to a lack of common national standards in ABE. It therefore recommended that the development of a set of standards to underpin all other aspects of teaching and learning should be an immediate priority. The report sets out a strategy for improving quality learning in ABE:

'High quality provision is a positive encouragement, not least to people who have experienced failure earlier in their educational lives. Poor quality of courses or teaching would be another discouragement.' (Moser, 99:56)

The report describes the hallmarks of good quality teaching of programmes as ones which deliver clearly structured teaching in ABE, provide for the acquisition of learner needs in a range of contexts, set goals for achievement, produce for each learner a learning plan, regularly assess and review progress, enables learners to gain credit and accreditation for their learning, and provide opportunities for progression to other learning. The report recommends the need for the development of a coherent framework of standards across all programmes. It notes:

'Only through such a coherent framework can an effective and co-ordinated strategy be ensured.' (Moser 99:57)

The report suggests there is a need to include a quality mark, and the use of benchmarks, targets and performance indicators, as well as reviewing standards of teaching and the use of materials. (99:57)
The need for well-trained staff who have regular opportunities for up-dating their knowledge and skills and for training teachers and volunteers who can teach in a variety of contexts is discussed:

'Training is crucial... There is evidence that programmes using well-trained staff, who receive regular professional updating, achieve the best outcomes in terms of learner achievements.' (99:58)

It refers to the increased use of information and communication technologies (ICT) as at the heart of improved quality in the delivery of ABE. It lists the benefits of integrating ABE and ICT which is a powerful motivation for adults with poor basic skills.

The BSU report for Northern Ireland (00:4) also emphasises the importance of quality. It notes that recent research in Northern Ireland found that there was inconsistency in programme quality assurance across the adult learning sector. It also noted there was a lack of coherence in the qualifications and progression routes open to learners. It notes (00:4) that evaluation of programme quality lacks consistency and overall supervision.

'Funding organisations, awarding bodies or differing standards frameworks guide quality assurance for the range of providers in different ways'

It also comments on the lack of clear professional development routes for tutors or consistency in qualified tutor status. It notes that 67% of tutors in the employment training sector have no ABE teaching qualification and less than 5% of voluntary /community tutors in Further Education a qualification. Most of the tutors are part-time (95% in the College sector.) Staff development and training are constrained by funding and availability of appropriate professional development opportunities appropriate training in specialist areas such as ICT, family learning, workplace learning, and special learning needs is limited.

These reports together indicate an increased awareness of the growing need for ABE in general and more specifically the need to provide for traditionally excluded groups. At the same time the failure of provision to respond effectively, and the need to develop quality provision based on need, determined by

government, is dictating a new quality agenda for measuring success. Much of the thinking in the reports is largely based on need as viewed through the eyes of government rather than through the perspectives of those working in the service or those with ABE needs. The documents do not engage in debate about ABE or how to measure quality in ABE and do not recognise the complexities of coming to terms with meanings or the need for a more inclusive approach that builds on consensus.

2.7 Overview

This chapter has provided a picture of the growth of ABE in Northern Ireland and the growing concern for quality. The modernisation process is bringing about changes in how ABE needs are conceived and the organisational structures for meeting these needs. Policy makers are increasingly raising questions about the nature of provision and whether it is meeting the needs of individuals. At the same time there seems to be little concern to involve the learner in discussions about need or the kind of assistance that might enable individuals or communities to develop. The learner may want the skills to enable her or him to get a job, but s/he also has other learning needs, which need to be addressed. Literacy as something located in the everyday lives of people is not central to the policy or quality agenda. Nor is the need for qualifications central to the lives of many adults.

Governments and their representatives develop policies for adult basic education. Since they are not based on a dialogue with learners and tutors, they make assumptions about what tutors and learners think. Policies are based on pre-determined notions of what skills adults need. The ABE curriculum becomes focused on the needs of the employment market and for greater participation in the workforce. In addition the growing concerns of globalisation and the emergence of the knowledge-based economy become central concerns in shaping ABE.

Despite all the rhetoric about a new era of peace and prosperity in Northern Ireland, the role which ABE might play in promoting peace is not taken up in ABE policies nor is the role which it can play in helping the learner understand the nature of division in society and in promoting social cohesion recognised.

Recently this prompted the *Basic Skills Unit* (00:3) to say:

'we must take cognisance of the non-market benefits of improved ABE levels in creating greater social cohesion and inclusion.'

Similarly, the particular interpretations of the purposes and goals of literacy have also led for calls for standardising programmes and creating evaluation tools, which will ensure that these goals are upheld. The need to develop quality systems is therefore very much driven by a top down agenda, which seeks to legitimise the aims, and goals set by government and educational planners.

The next chapter, *chapter 3*, will examine evidence emerging from research into adult basic education on the barriers preventing learners participating in learning opportunities, and the perceived benefits that they feel participation can bring. The breaking down of these barriers will be important in increasing participation and success in adult basic education. This theme will be returned to later in *Chapter 5 and 6*.

¹ By extrapolating figures from the reading standards of school leavers and applying them to the adult population, it was estimated that there were at least two million adults, whose reading age was below that of an average nine year-old. These figures were based on the 1938 definition of an illiterate, as *someone with a reading ability less than that of an average seven year-old* and a semi-literate as someone with a reading ability less than that of an average nine year-old. The estimate by the *British Association of Settlements* provided a base line figure of the number of adult illiterates served to draw public attention to the size of the problem. The startling news that two million adults in England and Wales (BAS 1974) were unable to read and write made the headlines and caught public interest. The following year it was estimated that in Northern Ireland at least 50,000 adults suffered from the same handicap (McRitchie 1975). The problem of adult illiteracy had been brought into the open and made the headlines throughout the world.

² The *Regional Curriculum Base* was established at the *University of Ulster* on an experimental basis in the 1980's. The ABE project which was based there, resulted in the development of a multi-media resource centre, the production of a number of ABE resources which included a catalogue of resources and a resource planner for training and the introduction of structured staff training throughout Northern Ireland. The unit also developed links with other support agencies in Britain, Ireland and other European countries. This project terminated in 1991.

³ The *Adult Literacy & Basic Skills Committee* (ALBEC) included representatives from the local *Education and Library Boards* in Northern Ireland, the *Further and Higher Education Colleges*, the *Training and Employment Agency* (T&EA), the *Educational Guidance Service for Adults* (EGSA), the *Department of Health and Social Services* (DHSS), the *Royal Society of Arts* (RSA), the *Northern Ireland Prison Education and Training Branch*, and the *Department of Education for Northern Ireland* (DENI) Inspectorate.

⁴ The *Workers Education Association* (WEA) is a voluntary provider of adult education including ABE and was set up in 1910. The WEA's mission is to '*make adult education more accessible to those who are educationally or socially disadvantaged, and a particular concern must be with those who have been failed by the school system*' (WEA, 1992).

⁵ The *International Adult Literacy Survey* (IALS) (1996) survey measured three dimensions of literacy:

Prose literacy: The knowledge and skills required for understanding and using information from text such as newspaper articles or passages of fiction.

Document Literacy: The knowledge and skills required to locate and use information in various formats such as timetables, graphs, charts and forms.

Quantitative Literacy: The knowledge and skills required to apply arithmetic operations either alone or sequentially, to numbers embedded in print materials such as calculating savings from a sales advertisement.

Using a scale, individuals were grouped into 5 levels of literacy from Level 1 (representing the lowest ability range) to Level 5 (the highest range). Northern Ireland's relative position was better when comparing the proportion of the population at the highest levels of literacy (Level 4/5) and younger adults (over 16) perform significantly better than older adults. Literacy was strongly associated with previous education. Those with lower levels of education were more likely to be at the lower literacy levels. The unemployed were twice as likely as those in employment to perform at level 1. Adults with poor literacy skills accounted for almost a quarter of the adult population, was more prevalent among the unemployed, the less well educated and Roman Catholics, and was approximately three times greater than equivalent levels reported in Sweden. Whilst not significantly different to levels in the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland or the United States, Northern Ireland fared badly in comparison with other countries including Sweden, Denmark, and Germany. The international survey clearly draws attention to the need for Northern Ireland to address this position.

⁶ In Northern Ireland the *Basic Skills Unit* (2000) conducted a baseline study of participation and provision. The report estimates that there are 5,500 adults participating in ABE and an estimated need of 250,000. The report notes that: '*Provision is patchy, it lacks coherence and co-ordination and is constrained by the unstable funding culture that prevails in Northern Ireland.*'

Chapter 3: Adult Basic Education and Barriers to Participation: findings from research

We have found that people are staggered when one confronts them with the basic facts about literacy and numeracy and rightly so. It is a state of affairs that can not be allowed to continue”.

Sir Claus Moser (1999)

If we want to increase access to, and participation in adult basic education programmes we must first identify the barriers that adults with literacy difficulties are likely to encounter if they wish to access tuition.

Bailey & Coleman (99:18)

In *Chapters 1 & 2*, I have examined different understandings of ABE and have shown how this affects understandings of ABE in the local context in Northern Ireland. There is also evidence of a growing interest in examining the quality of what is provided with the aim of determining whether provision is matching needs and seeing how provision might be improved. One of the key issues that emerged in the debate about quality, is the need to provide an inclusive approach to meeting the needs of adults. This inevitably raises questions about participation and how to widen involvement to include traditionally excluded groups.

This chapter examines factors, which prevent adults from participating in non-compulsory education or training, and examines ways in which more adults can be encouraged to get involved in education.

It examines some of the recent literature that has emerged about barriers to participation and links this to findings from two research studies in Northern Ireland. These findings are later compared to findings from the quality study reported in *chapter 5*. The study begins by discussing the research carried out in Northern Ireland and the methodology used in the studies.

3.1 Adult Basic Education research in Northern Ireland.

Very little research has been carried out in the field of ABE in Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland region is usually excluded from national research, yet its findings are normally applied to Northern Ireland. The assumption that these findings can be transferred and will have local applicability has hardly been questioned. The setting up of a *Basic Skills Unit* (1999), with a remit to encourage more research into ABE in Northern Ireland, is challenging this assumption, and there is now a growing recognition of the need for local research that will inform policy and practice.

This chapter reports on findings from two local studies, which were carried out between 1994-2000. The first of these is the *Adult Literacy and Numeracy Study* (1995) which included interesting findings about participation relevant to this study. The second is the *Making Belfast Work Evaluation Study* (1997), which examined education for adults in socially disadvantaged areas of North and West Belfast. A further study on *Quality and ABE* (2000) is reported in *chapter 5*.

Each of the studies provides illuminating evidence relevant participation and success in ABE. These studies corroborate many of the findings noted in national research. Each of these studies relied on qualitative research techniques to obtain data. The value and limitations of the methodology is first discussed below.

3.2 Qualitative research

The research methodology employed in all three research studies discussed later is based on a qualitative approach. The research methodology used in the 1995 *Adult Literacy Study* and the 1997 *Making Belfast Work* study is fully discussed in the published project reports. In *Chapter 5*, I will discuss the particular methodology employed in the *Quality and ABE*, for example, how the sample population was chosen and the particular methodological problem that the study raises. In the following section, I briefly discuss the value of qualitative research and general issues that arise, for example, in validating such research.

Qualitative research provides a rich and an in depth view of people's experiences of provision and is a useful means of illuminating problems and deficiencies where they exist. Group interviews in particular, are a valuable method of data collection because of the dynamics which exist within groups, which aids recall and also require people to analyse their own position in response to other views

The use of qualitative methods within the social sciences has rapidly expanded in the last few decades. At a first glance there appears to be no problem of validity within qualitative research – it has been an exception, rather than the rule, that a qualitative research report included a discussion of the reliability and the validity of the results. Qualitative interviews, analyses of texts etc. have all served to illuminate social situations and brought attention to a wide variety of social phenomena. The truth-value of the findings of this research has, however, been contested. Qualitative research has been rejected as unscientific, as subjective, unreliable and invalid in particular when evaluated by the validity criteria developed for psychometric tests. Kvale (89:7) notes that within qualitative research

'The established validity criteria have tended to be neglected or rejected, without, however, developing other criteria for the truth-value of qualitative findings. The field has been characterised by an unfortunate polarity of a positivist and a humanistic neglect of validity in social science.'

Kvale (89:73) specifies some consequences of giving up the notion of true knowledge as a mirror of reality, and discusses implications of an expanded concept of rationality for the procedures of validating social research findings. He stresses validation as investigation, continually checking, questioning, and theorising on the nature of the phenomena investigated. He outlines a communicative and a pragmatic concept of validation. The validity of the validity question is questioned, locating the question as interspersed between a modern quest for certitude and a post-modern relativism (89:7)

The language of everyday conversations contains a broader conception of reliability and validity. Kvale notes that within social research language *'goes beyond a positivist reification of the issue of truth and validity.'* He notes that the concept of validity has been extended from measurement to investigation, from test and laboratory settings to the social world at large, from the testing of knowledge to the generation and application of knowledge and from empirical correspondence to theoretical interpretation. He says that the limited empiricist concepts of validity have become solidified in mainstream social research. He quotes Cronbach (89:75) as criticising the use of narrow criterion-based validity and argues for a broader concept of construct validity where *'validation is more than corroboration: it is a process for developing sounder interpretations of observations'* He points out that validation of an educational hypothesis depends on value judgements as well as on the educational importance of what is measured.

A key issue in qualitative research is the issue of what is valid and what is true? Is the statement corresponding to the objective world, coherent to the unity, consistency and internal logic of a statement, and pragmatic by relating the truth of the knowledge to its practical consequences? Kvale (89:78) quotes Miles & Huberman as emphasising that there are no rules in qualitative research to indicate whether findings are valid and procedures robust. He mentions a number of tactics, which can be employed to test and confirm qualitative research. These include ensuring representative samples are used, weighting the evidence, providing contrasts and comparisons, replicating a finding, getting feedback from informants etc;

In discussing validation Kvale says *'it is difficult to get out of this validation paradox.'* Validation is investigation, continually checking, questioning, and theorising the subject matter investigated. In the study reported in this study the question of validity has been addressed by these very means. All of the studies are based on extensive interviews, which have been repeated again and again with individuals and groups. The purpose of the studies was not to justify existing knowledge as valid, but to generate new knowledge in specific situations. Nevertheless, some of the findings in one study are corroborated by findings in another that make conclusions more convincing.

3.3 Barriers to participation

Research studies in adult education have defined widening participation as a major issue in lifelong learning. It is now a major policy issue in post-school education, both in the UK and world-wide. While the concept of access has undeniable political resonances, the notion of participation in education may seem to be more neutral and straightforward.

Tight makes a simple distinction between participation and non-participation (96:129):

'the individual adult is either a participant – engaging in education, learning, training, or whatever activity is of interest – or a non-participant. This status may change from time to time, but at any one point should be clear'

More important perhaps are the issue that affects participation. McGivney (1990:17) argues that because of the sheer size, diversity and complexity of post-school education, the concept of participation is impossible to pin down. She also says that because of the diversity and complexity of human beings and their circumstances, no single theory can satisfactorily explain participation or non-participation. Usher and Bryant (89:106) note:

'We are presented with a set of partial and overlapping existing explanations in which the different approaches each offer plausible suggestions for lines of enquiry – in effect they are investigative pointers rather than testable propositions.'

In examining and discussing the factors affecting participation, it must be remembered that these studies tend to deal with non-participation in general, and must therefore be specifically applied to ABE. Furthermore, studies of participation have not so far led to the development of a composite theory which can be used to explain why adults do or do not participate in post-school education, nor, equally, have they suggested a means by which wider participation might be achieved.

McGivney (99:73) summarises the general factors affecting non-participation as follows:

'these can be divided into factors which impede a person's readiness to engage in learning (cultural, social and psychological barriers) and factors which inhibit his or her ability to participate (practical and structural barriers). As the motivation to learn comes before the experience of barriers, it is often assumed that its absence represents the most powerful deterrent. However, adult participation is the result of a complex process. It is the interaction of a whole swathe of cultural, structural and practical factors that brings some groups an introduction and keeps others out. An understanding of these should inform any approaches designed to increase their participation.'

This would suggest there are a whole range of circumstances, which serve as barriers to participation. Cross (1981) divided deterrents or barriers to participation into three categories – *situational, institutional and dispositional* and McGivney (1990) added *informational barriers* as a further category. Most recent studies on participation carried out by McGivney (1999) & Bailey and Coleman (1999), have linked these findings to the ABE context.

Informational barriers relate to the difficulties adult learners face in accessing or understanding information about provision. This particularly affects adults whose reading ability is limited.

According to McGivney (1990) a common finding in participation research is that non-participants have little or no knowledge of educational opportunities available. Of those categorised as *non-learners* (i.e. those who have not engaged in any learning over the past three years) identified by the *National Adult Learning Survey* (1997), only 6% had received any guidance about learning opportunities available. A report by the *National Adult Literacy Agency* in Ireland (NALA), *Access and Participation in Adult Literacy Schemes* (1999), argues that a significant number of participants thought there was not enough information available. Among non-learners half said nothing would encourage them to engage in learning. These findings are born out by Bailey and Coleman (1999) who also points out that, while slightly more than half of its sample were actively seeking tuition in literacy, almost half were not actually seeking information about ABE. As McGivney (90:17) points out, *'there is little evidence that simply knowing what is on offer leads to participation'*. Herdoux's study (1981) argued that the most striking factor separating participants and non-participants in educational programmes was the latter's general lack of involvement in communal life – people who are involved in social and cultural activities are in information networks and are thus more likely to be aware of educational opportunities.

It would be easy to conclude that there is an urgent need for more readily available information for learners with ABE needs. Recent reports such as *Kennedy (1997), Moser (1999), & Bailey and*

Coleman (1999), all join in pressing the case for broader publicity, particularly through the media. Zera and Jupp (2000) point out various strategies which range from outreach to word-of-mouth strategies, setting up learning centres in shopping centres, and dedicated media campaigns on television and elsewhere. The Kennedy report (1997) summarises this issue as follows:

‘The trick is to bring learning to learners wherever they are, whether it be in the family rooms in primary schools, libraries, betting shops, snooker halls, rooms above pubs or shopping malls’.

However, it is important to remember that successful marketing alone will not necessarily widen participation. Other situational, institutional and dispositional barriers still exist which need to be overcome.

Situational barriers relate to a person’s actual life situation, which would make it difficult for them to avail of educational opportunities. Obstacles most frequently reported are lack of time, distance, confidentiality and cost. Both McGivney (1990) and Bailey and Coleman (1999) point to the fact that most of the respondents in their surveys were in full-time employment or self-employed. They worked long hours, put in overtime, and in the case of rural students, worked on their farms. Women cited the time-consuming home duties such as caring for children, caring for the disabled or elderly as issues affecting their participation. In rural areas, distance and lack of transport were often cited as barriers to access. A fear about confidentiality was also seen as a problem in getting adults to participate. The stigma attached to receiving help with ABE means that many are worried about friends, neighbours or employers knowing they are attending tuition. In urban areas, with reasonable public transport, distance is less of a problem, though in all cases, participants tended to attend provision outside their local area, for fear of being stigmatised by individuals in the community. McGivney (1990) places cost as acting as a deterrent to many seeking educational opportunities. As with informational barriers, situational barriers require a concerted effort to provide flexibility in the provision of opportunities, but there is a need to bear in mind two caveats mentioned by McGivney (1990:18):

‘...most research findings show that the majority of participants in part-time education programmes are in paid employment, and people without job-related obligations are less likely to take advantage of learning opportunities. Thus an increase in leisure time does not necessarily lead to a boom for adult education ...while there is no doubt that increased fee levels affect the most economically disadvantaged groups, the evidence overall is inconclusive and contradictory. In the interviews with non-participants conducted during this research, cost was cited as a reason for non-participation by less than 9% of respondents ...It has frequently been found that non-participants who cite expense as an obstacle have little idea of the actual cost of learning activities.’

McGivney (1990:18) concluded that cost, like lack of time, may serve as a socially acceptable reason for not participating in adult learning, camouflaging more complex and possibly unrecognised reasons.

With **institutional barriers**, there is less disagreement. McGivney (1990) argues that one of the principal reasons for non-participation is the education system itself. Formal education institutions have traditionally catered for a young, white, middle-class and predominantly male section of the population, and the system has done little to support non-traditional students. This is particularly a problem for members of ethnic minorities, who may feel more, alienated in white, middle-class learning environments. Research overall reveals that there is a strong relationship between prior educational attainment, socio-economic status, and participation in adult education programmes. As the *Kennedy Report* comments:

‘If at first you don’t succeed ... you don’t succeed’ (97:21).

Lifelong learning is the continuation of a process which begins at school, and those who are non-participants are wary of education because of their previous experience of it – they had the experience of being labelled as failures and do not want to experience this again.

Bailey and Coleman (99:27) summarises the feelings of ABE learners as follows:

'Many are wary of school buildings, of formal enrolment procedures which involve queuing and form-filling, of the traditional classroom setting, of the traditional teacher student relationship, of being treated like children, of being asked to read aloud, of being made to feel silly or stupid in a group, or of being expected to learn too much too quickly.'

The middle-class ethos of *formal education* often leads those with ABE needs to argue that education is not for them. McGivney (90 & 99) emphasises the importance of class solidarity where education is not part of the value system of the group. Hostility to participation can often come from the feeling that education is for others, as well as the feeling that participation threatens accepted gender roles. Equally, there is a strong sense that education is something they have already completed, especially among males. (McGivney, 99).

Informational, situational and institutional barriers to participation are very much tied up with **dispositional barriers**. These barriers refer to attitudes, perception and expectations on the part of individuals, which may have more to do with non-participation than anything else. McGivney (1999) says that, in the case of excluded males, the question of inappropriateness and lack of relevance of educational opportunities are key factors affecting participation. Age or the belief that one is too old to learn, the learner not being aware of his/her learning needs, previous hostility towards school, and lack of confidence of the adult in his/her ability to learn are also often cited as dispositional barriers. All these factors come to the fore with adults who have ABE needs. Hedoux (1981) also cites the perception of powerlessness linked with the lack of future perspective, a feeling of an inability to anticipate or control the future, as a reason for non-participation. McGivney (1990:22) suggests that:

'Dispositional factors – attitudes, perceptions, expectations – constitute perhaps the most powerful deterrents to participation ... When these are added to the numerous practical obstacles that prevent individuals from taking up educational opportunities – lack of time, money, transport, day-time facilities, and childcare – the immense difficulties faced by providers wishing to recruit non-participant sections of the community can be appreciated.'

If a wider participation is to be achieved, it must take all of these factors into account. Thus, any scheme that aims to widen participants, especially for adults with ABE needs, must attempt to tackle both the tangible as well as the intangible. In practice, given that reasons for non-participation are complex and varied, it would seem impossible to be able to provide an easy answer to overcoming the many barriers that exist. However policies and ways of measuring participation and success must take account of such issues.

3.4 **Study 1: The Adult Literacy Study (1995)**

The aim of this project was to investigate the extent to which ABE provision was meeting the needs of participants and the barriers to the uptake of opportunities. There were three key objectives -examining the types of learners participating, looking at barriers in accessing provision and examining the adequacy of resources. (Mark 95:1),¹

The *1st Phase* (September 1993) involved 22 face-to-face interviews with key individuals from the public, commercial and voluntary sector involved in Adult literacy provision. In selecting interviewees, consideration was given to ensuring a broad representation of different expertise and to ensure geographical spread across Northern Ireland. Interviews were designed to identify the provider's perspective on issues raised by the research objectives of the project.

In *Phase 2* (December 1993) a sample was selected to reflect the public, private and voluntary sectors and was carried out by telephone. A total of 90 people were interviewed and included all of the then 23 *Further Education Colleges* in Northern Ireland, 19 *Recognised Training Organisations* (RTO'S), and 3 branches of the *Worker's Education Association* (WEA) who were providing literacy courses. Where possible, a tutor and someone with management responsibilities for adult literacy were interviewed. Response rates to the survey varied from 96% in the *Further Education Colleges* to 50 % in the *WEA*.

Phase 3 (May 1994) interviews focussed on adult learners participating in ABE and a total 55 learners were interviewed. This included 27 learners from *Further Education Colleges* provision, 23 from *Regional Training Organisation*, and 5 from the *Voluntary Sector*. Interviews were designed to investigate the views of learners about the adequacy of provision, barriers to take-up and how provision might be improved. Semi-structured group interviews were used to gather individual and common opinions. Questions covered issues relating to the learners' reasons for being on the course to the barriers and difficulties they experienced. Learners were also asked about their views on the course and future aspirations. The project researchers carried all of the above interviews out.

Table 1: Numbers of those interviewed in the *Adult Literacy Study (1995)*:

GROUP	NOS	%
Providers of ABE	112	67%
Learners	55	33%
Total	167	100%

Nos = Total Numbers interviewed for group.

Many of the findings from this research corroborate findings from other similar research. Findings also revealed evidence of differing perspectives among different groups interviewed – the providing agencies, the tutors, managers, and learners.

3.4.1 *The views of learners*

Learners mentioned a range of factors affecting their decisions on whether or not to participate in ABE.

Motivation was often a key factor. A variety of motives for participating were identified which were both vocational and personal in orientation. In most cases the accompanying feeling of inadequacy prompted the need to seek out help. The role of supportive friends and family was clear as they would often find out what courses were available and then encourage partners or family members to participate. The initial stimulus to participate in ABE was often triggered by some event or realisation in the person's work or personal life brought into focus by their lack of ABE skills.

The most common motives for seeking help were as a result of everyday life problems and the need to build up self-confidence and esteem. Adults often saw the acquisition of ABE skills as enabling them to get into better jobs or to progress within their work setting. Changes at work often demanded new skills that provided a strong motive to seek out help.

Some adults with young children mentioned that it was the need to help their children learn, which had spurred them on to seek help. This sometimes provided a reason to seek help. In contrast, research showed that in areas where unemployment was especially high, learners were often sceptical about the usefulness of such courses.

The *need for information* about what was available was also seen as an important factor in determining participation. Often this information came through a third party- a friend, a family member, or a professional person whom the adult has come into contact with etc;. The role of a supportive home and community environment suggested that advertising aimed at potential ABE students should reach not just the adults themselves, but their friends and family, who might in turn encourage their participation.

The barriers, which discouraged adults from taking up ABE provision, or had previously put them off joining, were mainly related to *attitudes and perceptions or expectations* of the individual. They included a fear of being known to have ABE needs, worries about travelling to unsafe areas, or not being able to cope with the course. The costs incurred by participation (mainly travel and course fees) were also seen to be factors influencing decisions. Where available, outreach provision was particularly valued as it cut down on travel time and costs. Childcare considerations were also reported to affect the students' participation and the extent to which they could attend regularly.

Decisions about whether to participate or not, reflect issues discussed earlier in this chapter. *Informational, institutional, dispositional and situational barriers* were all given as reasons for non-participation, and there was no real evidence that certain types of barriers were more prevalent. There

were, however, additional factors, which emerged from the study, which have implications for practice in Northern Ireland. For example, issues about where provision should be located take on additional perspectives for example areas free from vandalism and crime and the need to feel politically or religiously safe in an area. Opportunities to provide ABE provision which is cross community (i.e. in *Unionist and Republican areas* and attracting *Protestants and Catholics* in neutral venues, would therefore appear to be limited. On the one hand it may be seen as a good idea, but it will only succeed if people from the community are prepared to support it.

Once they had joined provision, many adults soon found added value in active participation. Helping improve the skills needed for moving into the employment market, increasing work prospects, and improving quality of life by enabling individuals to carry out their daily tasks more effectively and contributing to their personal development through, for example, reading for pleasure, were all mentioned as benefits. By far the greatest benefit seemed to be an increase in self-esteem. The *Adult Literacy and Numeracy Report* (95:34), gives some examples of comments made by learners, indicating a development of their ABE skills including self-confidence:

'It will give me a better way of life. I have more confidence in myself. When I go on holiday I'll be able to read the menus, where the tourist information is etc; I'll not be so depressed about not being able to do things'. (College student)

'Coming to the class has given me so many other interests...I've been coming here a year and I couldn't have told one plant from another, but now I have my garden organised because I can read when before I couldn't read the names' (College student)

'It encourages you to read around other subjects when before I hadn't done any reading'
(Training programme student)

These examples reflect the views of adult participating in the *formal sector* of education. Perhaps a weakness of this study was its focus on measuring educational skills and benefits gained through attendance at a designated ABE class. The study did not attempt to measure the knowledge and skills gained through participation in community development activities, which might also enhance abilities or competencies. Learners who participated in the study also highlighted a range of issues about the particular institution, which might affect successful participation in ABE. The learners gave particular praise to the content of their courses, styles of teaching and the qualities of their teachers. Teacher qualities praised were patience, the ability to listen, treating students as adults, getting on with all the learners, understanding the pressures learners face, and a respect for different abilities and needs. Very few learners reported experiencing difficulties on their particular course (95:32). Some mentioned transport and childcare problems and some indicated that more flexibility in attendance times would be helpful to help learners manage their other commitments. While provision of initial guidance, induction and support was found to be variable across providers, guidance and support during the time that the learner was receiving tuition, was considered to be excellent. (95:35) Suggestions for improvements to the courses tended to relate to general management issues rather than course organisation and content, although some suggestions for more computers and learning resources were made (95:33). Suggestions for improvements varied according to the kind of provision- college, training or community provision.²

3.4.2 The views of managers and tutors

Providing agencies, tutor and managers often emphasised quite different factors when speaking about widening participation and improving success.

The availability of funding to set up and support provision was seen as the greatest barrier to widening participation by tutors and managers. The SCORE report (94:40):

'The majority of co-ordinators and managers of Adult Basic Education provision felt that overall there was insufficient funding available for ABE in Northern Ireland. Providers see improvements in materials, accommodation and in the number and training of staff as priorities.'

The types of facilities and the suitability of accommodation also affected the development of provision. Resources and accommodation available were of high quality in government funded training centres but were more variable in college provision. Providers and tutors saw improvements in learning materials, adequate accommodation and staffing issues as key priorities in the development of the service. Given the reportedly low uptake of courses by women with young children, better crèche facilities were seen as important. The providers gave lower priority to guidance, monitoring and outreach provision.

The study showed that practice of providing initial assessment of individual students' needs was common practice and thorough in nature. However, systematic action plans, providing guidance on how to progress after completing a course, was almost non-existent. In contrast to initial assessment and induction guidance, pre-entry guidance was minimal across providers with variable information and advice being given when the students contacted providers. Most staff felt they needed more specialised guidance training. Nevertheless, participants considered the guidance and support experienced while on courses were excellent.

Resolving problems associated with staffing were seen as a key priority for improving provision. A better ratio of full time to part-time staff was emphasised, and providers would have liked a better ratio of staff to students.³ The need to improve the qualifications of staff working in ABE was also recognised. There was a widely held view that all staff should receive training, but there was also some concern at the high turnover rate of voluntary tutors who became qualified and then apparently moved out of literacy teaching.⁴

The study showed that while there was a great deal of satisfaction and praise for existing provision there was nevertheless a number of areas where improvement might be needed if opportunities to improve success and widen participation in ABE were to be realised. These changes were arbitrary and could not be applied to every learning context or need.

3.5 Study 2: The 'Making Belfast Work' Study (1997)

A second study that examines ABE in Northern Ireland provides illuminating evidence on issues affecting participation and success.⁵

In 1997, the *Making Belfast Work (MBW) initiative* commissioned a six month study to evaluate the impact of provision provided by the formal education sector or *Further Education Colleges* over an eight year period (1988-96) to meet the educational needs of socially disadvantaged adults, particularly those with ABE needs.

The study sought to evaluate the impact of additional government spending made available to the local college to provide for needs in a variety of locations throughout out north and west Belfast.⁶ The study includes findings about participation and success in ABE relevant to this study. In particular it provides information about management, course provision and uptake.

The research study involved staff and learners at the three key delivery centres in the project - the *Whiterock Centre*, the *Shankill Further Education Outcentre*, and the *Dunlewey Centre*. Each of these centres was managed by the *Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education*. The study consisted of both a quantitative study that gathered socio-economic information about past learners, and a qualitative study, which reported on outcomes and benefits for learners. The information gathered covered an eight-year period. (1988-1996) and was collected over a five month period (November '96- and March '97).

Semi-structured interviews using face-to-face interviews were organised with a sample of senior and middle managers to obtain data about management and administration of the MBW project. They included senior college managers (2), a representative from the Department of Education (DENI) project evaluation team (1), a senior manager from the MBW funding body (1), and middle managers employed in the three centres (4). A cross -sample of local organisers and tutors were also interviewed using a mix of face to face and telephone interviews (20) according to their preference.

A sample of learners who had participated in learning opportunities was interviewed in nine different groups. In depth interviews were conducted with a total of 30 learners who had participated in Adult

Basic Education to determine their perceptions as learners in each centre. Seventy-six percent of those who attended the interviews were female and half (50%) were aged 31-50. Almost half left school with no formal qualification and 83% reported they had improved their qualifications as a direct result of the project. The participants were asked about the perceived value of existing provision and whether any other approaches might have worked better. To enable a profile of learners to be constructed those participating in the group interviews completed a short questionnaire.

Table 2: Numbers of those interviewed in the 'Making Belfast Work' Study (1997):

GROUP	NOS	%
Managers	8	14%
Tutors	20	34%
Learners	30	52%
Total	58	100%

Nos = Total numbers interviewed for group.

3.5.1 Barriers to participation

The MBW evaluation (1997) details results of interviews with groups of learners who had ABE needs and who were invited to meetings to discuss the benefits and drawbacks of participating. The views expressed provide evidence of a range of barriers to participation. Findings suggest that if these problems can be minimised, then many more adults with a range of disadvantages would be encouraged to seek out provision.

Many of the barriers mentioned were related to *dispositional or attitudinal* issues. The report notes that many learners were worried about returning to study. This nervousness was often related to a lack of confidence of adults in the community. Motives in returning to study were often linked to overcoming personal issues such as developing more confidence, helping children learn, finding a job, relieving boredom and depression, assisting with tasks in the community (for example acting as secretary to a local pensioners club). *Apathy* due to lack of available employment at the end of courses was also perceived as a problem. Some claimed that there was too much emphasis put on achieving a certificate rather than on the learning itself. Many recognised that the chances of finding a job were remote, so they did not feel the need for a qualification.

The MBW research also revealed that factors related to the life situation of the individual were influencing whether or not s/he would participate in ABE:

'I don't think I would have gone elsewhere (i.e. to provision that was not close to home). It was very handy here and my family lived close by.' (97:68)

For some the reluctance to leave the area was because of familiarity with their surroundings, and for others the political turmoil in Northern Ireland and the fear of going into unknown areas meant that they would only go to provision in safe areas that they knew well. Comments such as -

'People don't like to go too far out of their area' (97:68) and *'I came here because it is in our own environment'* (97:63) indicate the importance of locating provision close to home. Students experiencing ABE problems were reported to be least likely to travel out of the area to attend provision elsewhere. (97:76)

Other factors such as family or work commitments also seemed to restrict or prevent participation. In particular, child-rearing responsibilities were expressed as a source of concern:

'I specifically needed a day class when the children were at school' (97:68)

'For me, I couldn't have gone anywhere else, because of the children, as I wouldn't have had any transport at that time. So having to go somewhere else would have ruled me out.' (97:68)

For others trying to work and study at the same time was given as a reason for non-participation. Negative attitudes of friends and family were also cited as barriers to getting involved. One woman

explained that her husband had been very sceptical of her studying, but later came around to returning to studying himself.

Not as obvious were the fears of returning to familiar educational institutions. The report noted (97:76) that schools and colleges were seen as places where people who have not participated in education and training felt excluded. Bad experiences of school were considered a barrier to returning to more formal education. This was particularly true for those with ABE needs who suffered from a lack of low self-esteem and confidence. Schools were regarded as large establishments where many had failed and this had subsequently affected their perceptions of educational establishments. Colleges were therefore also considered intimidating for a first point of entry or for those wishing to return to education. This was also exacerbated by the fact that there had not been any formal adult education provision in the area until fairly recently and so no tradition of attending formal educational institutions existed on the area. The desire to attend community-located provision was therefore very great. Inflexibility of opening hours of centres was also mentioned as a barrier to participation and progression. One student commented:

'I think it is a shame that the centre is limited in the number of weeks it can open .It would be nice to have a flexible centre where people can come in and take up a short term course, get a job and maybe come back again after (97:72)

Learners also mentioned the need to provide an appropriate learning environment, which would enable the learner to be successful. The need to provide access to reading material for study in the centre and for home study was seen as a problem issue for many completing programmes. The location of learning opportunities in a welcoming environment, which the learner can identify with, and the development of confidence in communities was also stressed as very important.

' Sometimes it is frightening thinking you are walking into a place where you don't know anybody or anything and you are afraid of looking stupid. I think that's why it is important to get out into the community, and to tell them what you are offering Let them see your face and then they will feel they know someone to go and see' (97:73)

Misunderstandings based on inaccurate or false information were also said to be prohibiting adults from taking up educational opportunities. Many felt that there should be more help given on how to choose the right course and the resulting financial implications from taking up education. It was reported that people did not have any clear idea about what they might achieve by studying and in particular how study might link to career goals. For example, many believed they would not get jobs as a result of participating in educational programmes. There were misconceptions too about the implications of study for those receiving unemployment benefits. Many were worried about losing these benefits if they attended classes. The interviews indicated a need for effective career guidance and employment counselling to enable adults to make informed choices about their future, to develop appropriated action plans and to help them find employment, and secure appropriate social security benefits both during and after study. While providers were aware of the need for guidance and counselling for adults returning to formal education, they recognised that a good deal more needs to be done. (97:82) People needed to be directed into knowing what to do, to make informed choices about what to learn and what qualifications to take, and to be assisted with taking well informed choices for their future. In some provision it was noted that help was already available. In one centre there was a savings scheme to encouraged learners to pay for their exam fees on a weekly basis.

3.5.2 Benefits of participation

Many of the learners stressed a range of benefits, which had resulted from their engagement in learning. Many of these perceived benefits are central to the debate about the measurement of quality and success in ABE.

Developing confidence was seen by many as the single most important benefit from engaging in learning and the development of individuals was reflected in increased confidence among many:

'I feel I have boosted my confidence and my self esteem which gave me wider scope when I was applying for jobs'. (97:70)

Many recognised that they needed support with more than just their written English. Attending provision had given them a lot more confidence in themselves, which in turn had helped them to speak more confidently in different situations. For some this new confidence had enabled them to come forward and talk about their learning experiences in groups:

'I would never have sat and spoke out like this before. It was the first thing to boost my confidence.' (97:66)

Some mentioned the *acquisition of qualifications* as an important outcome from engaging in learning. Many felt that qualifications were important in increasing their prospects in getting a job. Many spoke about having qualifications for job applications with pride.

'When you apply for a job, you need education (meaning qualifications) to get into a basic job.' (97:66)

Many said that they had left school at an early age in order to get a job and bring up a family. As a result they received a very limited education and the opportunity to have a second chance to learn and to achieve qualifications, was very important.

While qualifications were regarded as important and their value recognised in improving job prospects other benefits were also recognised by participants. They emphasised other achievements, which go beyond qualifications and academic achievement. Learners said that courses had helped them deal with a range of everyday situations. For example, one person noted she could now help her children with school homework, another claimed to be able to read books she had always wanted to read, and another said she could now write her Christmas cards and no longer needed to rely on others to help. The benefits are summarised by a learner as follows:

'The whole experience was about more than just education. It helps people mix and achieve in other ways. It is not just about certificates' (97:66)

The learners also valued the social benefits, which arose from taking up educational opportunities. The social aspect of returning to education was also judged to be very important for a range of people particularly those from isolated groups such as the elderly, the lonely, young mothers. Learners commented on the great camaraderie, which developed. The forming of new friendships was said to be particularly valuable, and many were still in close contact with those they had made new friendships with. These friendships were particularly valued among women, who often were not in any kind of employment. One learner commented:

'When you are in the house with small children it is not as easy as it is for a man to get up and walk into a job again. ...a woman's whole life centres on children and bills and shopping lists and getting from A to B as quickly as possible. So your whole life is centred on talking goo-gah-gah and what you are having for tonight's tea. When the children get to school you realise there is a big world out there. The opportunity to learn was valuable because... you were proving something to yourself.' (97:70)

Learners also felt that they would be more able to help others particularly children with their learning. Some mentioned that their children benefited from the extra encouragement they were able to give as a result of them having participated in courses. They were also able to encourage others:

'You are able to encourage people because you are doing it yourself. You can act as an education person in your own community.' (97:71)

The learners were in general very appreciative of provision, and stressed that the opportunities presented to them had enabled them to develop the initial confidence so important to move onto further things:

'The classes here are excellent. There isn't the same pressure with exams, and a lot of it is confidence building. Basically it is preparing people for bigger and better things without any pressure. It's very important for adult learners...they are a different section of the community really need to be nurtured in the early days when they return to education, without other pressures which you will get if you walk into a college.' (97:73)

Learners commented on the atmosphere for learning which existed to encourage adults, and which they felt was about right. They also noted that the tutors were interested in them as individuals and this had been important in encouraging them to make progress.

The success of the MBW project, it was felt, had been made possible through the development of excellent working relationships with the community. Each of the MBW centres had developed close links with other local community groups and many of the tutors came from the area, and were able to understand the needs of local people better. The learners commented:

'The programme was based on need generated from the community...The provision gave the people the programme they wanted' (97:74)

There was little evidence of employer involvement in the programme. This was partly explained by the relatively few large employers in the locality, but also by the informal approach to the curriculum, which did not emphasise formal qualification or career progression.

'There are perceptions in the area that jobs around here aren't for local people. Many local people never see a job as a possibility. You can't just put them on a course that leads nowhere.' (97:75)

Summarising the benefits perceived by individuals who had participated in ABE, the report noted (97:82):

'The sense of worth students gained from ABE provision was significant. Just how far they had progressed was important to them and how they could now use their new skills to help them in a wide variety of situations. ABE students stressed their levels of 'satisfaction' and usefulness' of the courses they attended. The evidence presented to us strongly suggested that the courses did contribute in helping attack under achievement, low motivation and a lack of skills, particularly as interviews tended to have completed more than one course and had been back in education for at least a couple of academic years.'

Benefits and drawbacks perceived by providers

The report noted (97:80) that the additional financial resources were particularly valuable in increasing participation. Increased funding enabled them to develop a more responsive education service, with significantly increased participation in ABE. At a time when colleges were operating under strict financial constraints with no additional money for outreach activities, it provided easily accessible education provision for disadvantaged areas of west Belfast. The report noted the MBW project:

'Allowed a base to be built in the community' and 'enabled chances to be taken to find out what people wanted.' (97:55).

Availability and accessibility to suitable accommodation generally determined the location of classes. There were mixed feelings about the suitability of the accommodation used. Some expressed concern as many of the buildings used for classes were said to be of poor quality, in poor decorative order, lacked catering facilities and did not have appropriate creche facilities, for which there was high demand. Some of the classes were located in disused schools, and it was felt these premises may have discouraged some people from attending classes. The report noted (97:81):

'Although in many instances the only accommodation available was in disused schools, this is not a particularly desirable location to encourage people to return to education especially in areas where education is not a major priority and where their previous experience has been negative.'

Some concern was raised about project management. The research indicated that while some centres had procedures for monitoring and evaluating progress, there was no overall policy. The report (97:80) comments:

'Given the level of funding which was made available to the three projects in this evaluation one would have expected to find more evidence of close monitoring'

The evaluation study noted (97:57) that many would have welcomed more sophisticated procedures for monitoring provision. It noted (97:79) that concern was expressed about the lack of co-ordination in planning activities and management and delivery. It suggested more thought should have been given to setting overall objectives, to co-operation between centres and to listening to what local people had to say. For example, the report notes (97:80) there were assumptions made about communities and their unwillingness to travel to other centres or engage across the political and religious divide. Others believed that cross-community work could work if tried and properly planned.

The report also notes weaknesses in record keeping at management level. The report comments (97:80)

'record keeping by government departments ...was notable by its absence .. a change in personnel frustrated attempts to locate what may have existed given the time constraints of our evaluation'

At local level there was no record or analysis of student achievement. The aims of the project in providing qualifications and improving employability had not been measured.

'student records were incomplete and the outcome of examinations were not held ...from the outset the intervention was designed to improve the level of qualification among the local population improving their employability. In the light of this it would appear to have been a major oversight that there was no imperative to measure outcomes.'

The report noted the need for improved guidance and counselling facilities and there was evidence of links developing between centres to facilitate recruitment and progression. There was however no formal process or networking through which contacts could be made and developed. There was also a lack of contact across services to discuss common issues and problems.

The benefits gained from adult participation in ABE were said to have wider community benefits in the areas where the centres were located. For example, it was thought that provision had helped establish an educational culture, and the level of qualifications within the areas surrounding the centres was raised, simply by having provision within the localities.

There was also the view that participation in adult education widened peoples' horizons and gave them a sense of empowerment. As a result of participation in education it was reported that many students got involved in community development activities. Participating in education had enabled them to make applications for funding for local groups and raising questions about the development of their communities through local consultation forums. In this way education was helping to facilitate community development, social action and change.

The MBW findings provide further evidence about the factors which affect participation in ABE. The findings were similar to findings from the *Adult Literacy Study (1995)*. It demonstrated that while formal provision offering qualifications was suitable for some adults, particularly those seeking work, it was not seen as appropriate by others who preferred community located provision which did not have qualifications as a core value. In general, the MBW scheme had significantly increased numbers of adults participating in ABE, and positive long term benefits for adults arose as a result of participation for example in building self confidence, improving ABE skills, and finding work.

3.6 Overview

This chapter has examined key factors affecting participation, which are likely to affect participation and success in ABE. Findings from research have shown a complex set of factors which influence participation which include informational, situational, institutional and dispositional barriers. The studies have also revealed a range of specific factors that are likely to influence success in learning. These include programme management issues (viz. marketing strategies, linkages across and between services, student support, staff training, curriculum design, funding and management of programmes) and factors related to the student experience (viz. confidence building, atmosphere, relationships with tutors, assessment and accreditation, and guidance and support.)

These studies facilitate our understanding of the barriers which ABE learners face in Northern Ireland when returning to education. The barriers are much the same as those which adults face elsewhere. What is clear is that if attention is not given to reducing barriers, the result is likely to be that some will

not be able to continue with their studies, and others who need help, will be prevented from taking up learning opportunities. The views expressed in the *Making Belfast Report* support this assertion.

The report provides evidence of issues that must be acknowledged, if provision is to be inclusive and promote success. If these findings can influence the development of provision, then participation in ABE could be widened to include new groups and the possibility of success greatly increased. The identification of issues affecting participation and success is important in developing measures for evaluating success and for evaluating the quality of provision. The findings enable us to map a range of factors that might influence participation and success in the local context. They also provide information for improving services, developing quality frameworks and measuring improvements.

The issues raised in the two studies reported above provide illuminating evidence about participation, which will be taken up again when considering the findings from the *Quality and ABE Study*, reported in *Chapter 5*. Together the findings from all three studies influence the conclusions in *Chapter 6*.

¹ In 1993, the Department of Education for Northern Ireland (DENI) commissioned research to gain information about the extent to which ABE provision was meeting the needs of learners. The research also sought to identify the kinds of students who were participating in ABE learning opportunities, to examine the barriers, to update of opportunities, consider the adequacy of funding and other resources and consider the adequacy of staffing. As the main concern of the study was the factors likely to encourage and enhance or inhibit ABE experience it was thought essential to collect views of participants in ABE provision, of others not participating in ABE, and of the providers of ABE. An analysis of views was designed to complement the comprehensive national data on participation. Information was also sought on other factors such as numbers participating in ABE and costs of provision. Interviews were conducted in three phases. Data was collected from interviews with key personnel and with learners in three phases.

² The *Adult Literacy and Numeracy* report (95: 33) note that suggestions for improvement to courses related to general issues. For *Further Education Colleges* these included-better child care facilities and advertising courses in more accessible forms. For example, ABE courses were sometimes advertised alongside other courses provided by colleges and consequently, were described as *not easy to see in a long list of courses*. Door-to-door leafleting and radio and TV advertising were seen as the most effective means of publicity. Also recommended were: providing more places for classes in the community; using computers in learning; using college transport classes to reduce cost of travel; reviewing the learning materials used on courses to ensure that they related to the students' interests; allocating more time for classes; and providing more tutors to reduce class size. For *the training sector* the provision of courses longer than 3 months and trying to prevent drop out were seen as key issues. In *the community sector*, the need for better promotional strategies was seen as the major issue.

³ The *Adult Literacy and Numeracy Survey*. (95:vii) indicates that the views of ABE providers are that staff tutor ratios should be one tutor to five adult learners. However, in practice the range was most likely to be one tutor for between six and thirteen adult learners

⁴ Some interesting information emerged in relation to staff qualifications. Full-time staff are the most likely to be qualified to teach ABE. However, most ABE teaching is done by part-time and voluntary tutors whose level of relevant qualifications is comparatively low compared with full time staff.(95:vii)

⁵ The urban re-generation project, *Making Belfast Work*, was launched in 1988 to: '*reinforce the efforts being made to tackle the social, economic, and environmental problems of the most disadvantaged areas of Belfast.*' Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, NI Information Service (1988) The MBW strategy (95:19) noted that long term unemployment and lack of jobs remain the most pressing issues in Belfast at that time. In pursuing the aims of access to education and training for jobs the scheme developed a comprehensive development programme across the education, health, environment sectors and the voluntary sector. The project also sought to improve the standard and

level of achievement in the formal education sector to meet the needs of employers. It included developing projects in ABE to increase access to education opportunities. The *Making Belfast Work* evaluation report (97:10-20) notes that the scheme was targeted at those areas of the city, which experienced multiple deprivation. These areas were characterised by higher than average levels of poverty, unemployment, particularly long unemployment, a large number of people in skilled or semi-skilled jobs, people with low levels of qualifications, and high concentrations of dependent populations such as one parent families, children and elderly people. An additional feature of these areas was the high degree of religious segregation and close association with paramilitary influence. The area was not a place where Further Education had had much of an impact in the past. A task of the initiative was therefore to attract those who were not interested in adult education because the community was alienated from education. The population of North and West Belfast area declined by 36% over the period 1971-91 (with a 52% decline in the Shankill, greater than any other area in North and West Belfast). The area also contained 16% of Northern Ireland's unemployment and 20% of Northern Ireland's long term unemployment (Gaffikin and Morrissey 96). When launched in 1988, the objectives of the project were to stimulate greater economic activity, to improve the quality of life and the environment, and to equip the people of these areas to compete successfully for available employment. To achieve these aims the strategy emphasised the need to foster forms of regeneration involving community participation and to enhance the capacities for community development and programmes to address the needs of marginalised learners. The strategy statement (1995) mentions two primary aims of the project concerned with conditions of living and livelihood-to increase opportunities for residents of *Making Belfast Work* areas to secure employment and to improve their quality of life. The project had therefore a particular emphasis on developing employment skills or enhancing adult basic education skills to enable residents to gain access training for employment. The scheme aimed at helping people increase confidence and prepare for and find employment. It sought to promote employability by: developing skills relevant to the needs of existing and potential employers; targeting government training policies more sharply; seeking to motivate the unemployed to become more skilled; improving access to employment opportunities in Belfast and elsewhere; and developing closer links with employers. The scheme provided additional money in pursuit of the above aims for the area. In 1990, £34.5 million sterling (approximately 55million Euros), was provided for an educational package which led to the setting up of the three outreach centres already mentioned in West Belfast. The centres were deemed necessary because of: '*high level of demand for adult and continuing education in West Belfast and the inability of the Further Education sector within the Belfast board to meet demand from within existing resources.*' (Mark et al 97:21) These centres sought to enhance employability through easier access to further education facilities and to make adult education, including ABE, more available to all the residents of north and west Belfast. The monitoring of spending projects was required and targets were set and evaluated against these measures. The Department of Education carried out financial monitoring and evaluation of the curriculum.

⁶ The intended purpose of the evaluation, as summarised in the report (1997), *An Evaluation of MBW's Impact on Further Education Provision in North & West Belfast (1988-96)* was to examine the educational benefits gained and the employment opportunities created for residents of the area through the provision of adult education activities, including ABE at three centres in North and West Belfast - *the Whiterock Centre, the Dunlewey Centre, and the Shankill Further Education Centre*. The objectives of the evaluation included a report on ABE provision and an examination of achievements of students into employment or other educational opportunities.

The evaluation was carried out over seven-month period and used qualitative approaches to gather data to establish the outcomes and benefits for students in the absence of any qualification data being available. Semi-structured face to face interviews conducted with a sample of policy makers and those involved in the delivery of adult education. Group interviews were held with people who had participated in the project, and focussed group and individual interviews were conducted with representatives from the community to determine the views of non-participating adults. The purpose of these interviews was to determine the impact of current provision, and views about what changes might be needed to widen participation.

Chapter 4: The Concept of Quality and its implications for Literacy

'Quality like 'freedom' or 'justice' is an elusive concept. We all have an instinctive understanding of what it means, but it is difficult to articulate. Quality is also a value-laden term: it is subjectively associated with that which is good and worthwhile.' Green (94:12)

'High quality provision is a positive encouragement not least to people who have failure in their early lives...there is much to improve on what is on offer.'
The Moser Report: Improving Literacy and Numeracy (1999)

In Chapter 3, the factors that affected participation in ABE were identified. While the research described has revealed useful findings about adult experiences of participation, it was not specifically designed to examine how participation might be improved and responses were limited to a relatively small sample of respondents. The need to examine the views of a wider sample representing different perspectives was evident from the study. A further enquiry could test existing assumptions and could perhaps identify new issues. The quality study reported in the next chapter takes up the issues identified here and proposes a quality framework for measuring success in adult basic education..

In this chapter, the concept of *quality* is examined and the questions it raises for educators are explored. What are quality models and how can they be applied to the education sector? How do we define the customer in education and to what extent should quality be concerned with the customer? To what extent should the needs of learners shape the educational programmes of study and how should learner needs influence quality measurement? The concept of quality also raises a number of questions specific to the ABE context. How can quality be defined in the ABE setting? What makes a programme good? How do we assess teaching and learning? How can we compare programmes? How can we judge if a certain modification to an educational programme is a change for the better?

These are just some of the questions that arise when applying quality concepts to education and the ABE context. Answers to these questions may vary and will be influenced by local and national agendas.

Issues posed by these questions are examined and their implications for ABE are discussed. The chapter will summarise some of the key issues in the quality debate - its meaning, its relevance for adult educators and its implications for practice. It will review what policy documents are saying about quality and its implications for ABE.

4.1 The quest for quality

Interest in the quality question has grown substantially in recent years in education. Educators want to improve their practices in measuring quality and success, but they do not want to be excluded from the process of deciding what to measure and how to measure it.

Before discussing the *meaning of quality*, it is important to examine the origins for the concept. *Quality* has developed into an industry and global movement, encompassing commercial, political and social development. Its influence has spanned the private and public sectors, and includes everyone with a vested interest in improvement. It has also emerged as an important issue for discussion and is likely to become more central to the debate about ABE. Acaro (1995) predicted this continued expansion -

'Quality is the single most important issue in education, business and government today.'

The word quality has become associated with the modernisation process in society. The concept began to take hold in the UK in the late 1970s, with the advent of a new political administration, which championed free-market economic principles and practices. Longworth (99:18) notes that it was also matched by a growth in participation of the consumer in decision making. He says:

'The political, social and economic trend has changed previous attitudes considerably, with the gradual rolling-back of the state and the firmer placing of responsibility for personal development onto the individual'

Quality is seen as a major issue in all the recent policy documents on education in the UK. Each document contains references to *'quality of provision'*, *'accountability'* and *'value for money'*. The Moser Report on ABE (1999) devotes a whole chapter to the issue of quality, indicating that both provision and quality are mutually compatible and complementary.

Donnelly (1999) highlights the development of recent British government thinking on quality:

'the focus of central government's attention has shifted from encouraging quality through the threat of externalisation and privatisation to the approach of 'best value.' The fundamental principles are defined as accountability, transparency, continuous improvement, and ownership, and are to be delivered through sound governance, long-term planning, and the application of performance management including the evidence of top quality services.'

For the cynical, quality management has been described as the *'flavour of the decade'*, a *'fashion'*, and a *'bandwagon'*. However, it is also possible to argue that quality has always been at the centre of the debate about education. Indeed there are few other social processes where a concern for standards has been such a constant imperative. And as knowledge becomes the resource of post-capitalist society, the concern for quality in the production and distribution of knowledge is likely to become even more centre stage.

The quality debate in education has had many positive outcomes and has raised new questions about how we do things and why. In the past we have been concerned with testing what students know, rather than evaluating the system in which adults learn and those who teach in it. Issues about how adults learn have hardly been examined or evaluated. More and more we are being asked to examine and defend our approaches to managing and delivering education and in ABE these questions are equally important.

4.2 Quality and its management

Drucker (95:237) sums up the concern about quality as follows:

'We will have to learn to define the quality of education and the productivity of education and we need systematic work on the quality of knowledge.'

The history of quality thinking goes back to the 1950s. Much of the early thinking about quality was developed in an industrial context and includes definitions such as *'a predictable degree of uniformity and dependability at low cost and suited to the market'* (Denning) and *'quality as fitness for use'*. (Juran) These notions of quality provide a starting point for many current quality philosophies.

Quality management emerged in Japan in the years following the Second World War and was inspired and sustained by two Americans, Denning and Juran. Their early work was largely concerned with statistical methods of measuring quality in the engineering industry. During the 1950s and 1960s the purely statistical approach was extended and developed by Denning and Juran, and increasingly by Japanese industrialists and management writers, notably Ishikawa and Taguchi. The success of many Japanese industries in the 1960s and 1970s has been largely credited to the quality movement.

In the late 1970s the work of Denning was discovered in the USA and this led to an explosion of activity in American industry. At about the same time Peters and Waterman published *'In the Search of Excellence'* (1982), which reinforced the fundamental message that explains the success of the Japanese – customer satisfaction is everything. The message began to make an impact in the UK in the early 1980s and there has been a number of significant initiatives, notably the *National Quality Campaign* and the establishment of the *British Quality Association* in 1981, following a government report entitled *'Standards, Quality and International Competitiveness'* (1982)

It is difficult, if not impossible, to quantify the impact of the quality movement in British industry. There is evidence of increasing interest by virtue of the volume of training and consultancy taking place, the demand for quality accreditation, the job advertisements for quality managers, and the number of organisations using a concept of quality in their corporate image.

What emerged in the 1990s was an increasing confidence in organisations that they did not need to adopt specific formulations, but rather that they should have an emphasis on '*total quality*' notably the importance attached to vision, values, leadership and strategic thinking.

The emergence of quality thinking has led to the development different approaches to assessing quality. A number of models for measuring quality have developed. These have included the *International Organisation for Standardisation* (ISO) Model, *Total Quality Management* (TQM) and many other quality awards (*Annex 1*). The development of these models demonstrate that there are different ways of thinking about quality and that there are many tools for measuring it. It is not possible to say that there is one definition, method or tool for measurement. While it may be possible to apply different models to the education context, the choice of which model to apply rarely rests with the provider. More and more ways of measuring quality are being prescribed by external bodies with a responsibility for quality assurance and inspection such as an education authority or an independent publicly funded body.

Total Quality Management has developed from various quality control philosophies and management systems and is now the predominant approach to quality in the private sector. It has also found favour in the public sector, where its particular philosophy has found appeal with education providers. The philosophy of TQM is essentially one of continuous improvement and is described in *annexe 1*. The aim is to provide educational institutions with a set of practical tools for meeting and exceeding present and future needs, wants and expectations. Simply stated, it is an organisational strategy involving all employees, aimed at continuously improving organisation effectiveness in achieving customer satisfaction. In this definition, the customer also includes the internal customers within an organisation. Total quality is '*total*' in three senses – it covers every process, every job and every person. Total quality goes beyond the traditional idea of quality, which has been expressed as '*the degree of conformance to a standard or the product of workmanship*.' It applies the concept that quality is the degree of user satisfaction or the fitness of the product for use. In other words, the customer determines whether or not quality has been achieved in its totality.

Total quality radically alters the nature and basic operating philosophy of organisations. However total quality is more than an attempt to make better products, it is also a search for '*better ways to make better products*.' Adopting the *Total Quality Management* philosophy commits the organisation to the belief that there is always a better way of doing things, a way to make better use of the organisations resources, and a way to be more productive.

Accreditation in education means *the act of certifying that an educational institution maintains suitable standards*. This may mean getting a certificate for meeting the standards set by an authority on the field in question. Some question whether accreditation in education is really needed. If accreditation is demanded, it is often argued that it should be based on the idea of a continuous audit of improvement (EUCEN: 159). Much more emphasis is now being placed on accountability and there is a concern that credibility through accountability has to be established first and improvement will follow. The dominant approach, world-wide, is one of delegated accountability monitored via self-assessment performance indicators and peer review. Real enhancement is internally driven. In practical terms, external quality monitoring needs to shift from assessing provision to auditing improvement, by emphasising a process of continuous improvement driven by the people who can effect transformation, namely the tutors, learners and other support staff.

There is considerable debate about the appropriateness of quality models for education and how quality should be measured. Quality in education and training covers many different aspects and may be considered from different perspectives. When specifying ways of assessing quality a number of issues might be taken into account. These might include the level where assessment takes place (ie. the policy, institutional, or learning process level), whether the assessment is internal or external, whether it covers only education and training aspects or other issues as well, what methodology it uses, and the aim and purpose of quality assessment. Clearly several of these aspects are linked. eg. whoever undertakes assessment depends partly on the purpose, the level and what will be evaluated.

A huge number of different approaches for internal quality assessment have emerged. These include evaluation based on an institution's own perception of what quality is, standardised checklists and quality guides, peer review procedures (experts drawn from similar organisations) and/or mutual audits by education institutions, statistical indicators to compare education providers, and voluntary external

surveys based on questionnaires to customers. The documents resulting from self-assessment procedures may serve as an input to external assessment. External assessment also varies a great deal by country and type of education. It may be for example an audit or assessment by a government body, peer review, accreditation of programmes by professional societies, certification by private quality auditors, verification of standards by external examiners, or teacher performance evaluation by students. Those undertaking external assessments may use a variety of approaches such as checklists, interviews, analysis of documents and survey of customers. An assessment approach will reflect the particular quality perception of the quality assessor. Even the most comprehensive approaches to quality assessment cannot claim to deal with all quality aspects.

Quality assessment approaches may differ in aim and purpose. The purposes of internal assessment may be to improve quality of internal processes, enhance image with customers, monitor consistency with a larger institution, ensure compliance with certain standards, meet legal obligations, prepare for an external evaluation, provide input to management decisions or help staff to understand quality needs. Aims and purposes of external audits or programme reviews may, if it is a voluntary initiative of the institution, coincide with some of those listed above. If it concerns a formal requirement, there may be additional goals such as helping an institution identify strengths and weaknesses, assisting with self evaluation, suggesting potential improvements, demonstrating to funders that the quality systems are operating effectively, disseminating good practice about quality systems, serving as an input for funding decisions, or certifying or accrediting an institution for a course programme to a certain norm or standard.

In summary, quality assessment methods are an important and necessary element of every quality implementation strategy, and their relevance increases when they are well defined, credible and when purposes are clearly understood.

The emergence of *quality* as a key issues in ABE, has, as we have seen, led to a heightened interest in understanding its meaning and its application. There have been calls for a greater understanding and reflection on what is meant by quality to increase effectiveness. The TQM concept of quality, with its emphasis on *continuous improvement*, has found favour in the field of education and it is this model which is used to test the quality framework developed in *chapter 5*.

4.3 Evaluation and quality

Quality is not a new subject in education. Education institutions, teachers, administrators and policy makers have always been concerned with quality in education provision and consumers generally know what makes a good school or education system. Even where a formal quality approach has not been adopted methods, norms, procedures and standards have been used to ensure quality of provision. The emergence of an interest in the quality concept in education therefore does not mean that educators have not been either aware of or interested in the concept. The term *assessment* seems to be the most commonly used term in books about quality in education. The term is used in a fairly broad sense and may refer to programme teaching and training, students, institutions and policy. Similar concepts such as ‘*evaluation*’ and ‘*review*’ are also used in a similar generic way. These terms have often been used to indicate internal or external assessment. *Evaluation*, Schwandt defines as: ‘*the act of interpreting the value (merit worth, significance) of some activity, object, decision, program, policy, idea.*’ (00:553)

He distinguishes between different ways of thinking about *evaluation*. He says it can be either action-oriented self-understanding, or special knowledge delivered by an impartial, third party expert. In education, he points out that traditionally educators have tended to assume that evaluation is best accomplished when the person making the judgement is ‘*impartial and disinterested.*’ He comments:

‘When we seek a judgement of the value of an educational policy, a curriculum innovation, or event the accomplishments of an individual student, we often look outside the view of those most intimately familiar with the policy, curriculum, or student for a third-party judgement.’ (00:553)

In this context, evaluation is seen as a special kind of expertise which can be contracted out to specialists and who are usually paid to judge the value of programmes, policies etc. The expert’s knowledge is valued because ‘*the expert is thought to stand in an impartial, unbiased and objective (and hence ‘disengaged’) relationship vis-à-vis that which he or she evaluates.*’ (00:553). He also points out that the idea of disengagement is closely linked to the notion of *objectivity* and the

knowledge produced *'meets a moral, political demand for impartiality and fairness; a kind of knowledge unaffected by subjective preferences and feeling.'*

So one way to think about evaluation is as an enterprise dedicated to making third-party, independent, impartial, unbiased, objective interpretations of the merit, worth or significance of something. The evaluation knowledge produced by experts is then to be used by practitioners to improve their respective practice.

Schwandt notes that a second way of thinking about evaluation is to improve accountability, facilitate development and generate new knowledge through steps or phases in the expert's work. He says that this way of thinking is based on the assumption that knowledge produced by evaluators enlightens users on specific evaluation issues in a given policy or programme.

'Instrumental use assumes something like direct correspondence between the findings and recommendations of a particular evaluation study and the decisions taken by decision makers to modify, extend, terminate or otherwise change a program or policy.' (Schwandt 00:555)

But evaluation does not take place in isolation from the political environment in which the studies are commissioned and to which the students relate. So evaluators are constantly constrained by differing political considerations and this can lead to a conflict in serving client needs and wider public needs.

The contemporary social scientific discourse of evaluation reflects a concern with how best to judge the value, quality or worth of an evaluation itself. Schwandt says this concern takes up issues of both *technical merit* (excellent in the choice and use of particular methods and procedures) as well as *substantive value* (the value added by an evaluation, clients' and other stakeholders' perceptions of the quality of evaluation etc).

4.4 Quality and education

Quality as it relates to adult education is somewhat difficult to define. Jarvis (95:226) recounts *'whilst the language of quality is appearing in adult and continuing education, the definition of the concept is much more problematic'*

As we have seen, the use of the term quality in education is fairly recent and when used, it is often vague and even inconsistent. Indeed several alternative terms are often used when referring to quality. We have also seen the application of *quality* and similar concepts in education are subjective and even controversial. These differences have their roots in different definitions of what quality in education is all about. Even when agreement exists on the exact purpose of a particular type of learning and the relevance of a particular quality approach, it may not be possible to develop a comprehensive assessment methodology. Given the differences in definition and purposes, it might be argued that objectivity is hardly possible or even desirable.

The controversy surrounding the nature and goals of education adds fuel to the problem. Our particular view of what education is and is trying to achieve will ultimately influence our understanding of quality. One view of education is that it should be about the cultivation of knowledge, and the development of the individual as part of this notion. Another view is that the role of education is predominantly economic, which leads to the view that education is about producing qualified individuals to meet the needs of employers. While in practice most education systems acknowledge both twin aims, the views are to some extent conflicting and consequently it is not possible to apply the principles of quality assurance and assessment in a manner that satisfies everyone.

Burnham (1997:6) quotes Sallis as emphasising the need for philosophical underpinning of the notion of quality. He says:

'There is so much baggage attached to the idea of quality that without some understanding of its philosophical underpinnings it is difficult to build the management structures necessary to achieve the goal of improving the education of students.' Sallis (1996)

Quality in education can be interpreted as an absolute concept. This interpretation of quality implies the highest possible standard or *simply the best*. In an education sense, this concept of quality is

sometimes described as elitist. More recently, there has been a movement away from an *elitist* or *absolute* understanding of quality towards a *relative* interpretation, which is about measuring against a standard, or expectations of customers. Quality in the relative sense, it can be said, is about measuring up to a predetermined standard and meeting those standards time and time again. In this process the client becomes central to the whole process. Here too the product or service must take into account what its *customers* expect and must be *fit for their purposes*.

Sallis (1996) examines two aspects of the relative definition. The first is concerned with whether a service measures up to what is asked or expected of it. The usage, fitness *for purpose*, is referred to by Sallis as the *procedural* concept of quality, which is about proving that things have happened in accordance with predetermined specifications. Quality is consistently achieved by the development of a system of written procedures to which working practices have to conform. Emphasis on procedures alone is seen as bureaucratic and can exclude the essence of quality as expressed by learners. The second aspect is to do with organisational transformation. It recognises the need to transfer the focuses of the organisation from product or output to customer. In addition to including the measurable aspects of quality, it seeks to integrate what are referred to as *softer* concepts such as care, customer service and social responsibility.

Sallis identified four imperatives for adopting a quality management approach in education, which he describes as moral, environmental, for survival, and accountability.

The moral imperative he says is concerned with optimising the opportunities for achieving full potential, with values at the core of every decision-making process and educational procedure. It is closely related to the professional imperative in that it implies commitment to the needs of a client and an obligation to meet those needs by deploying knowledge and skills to better effect. Being a professional confers a moral imperative to deliver consistent, high levels of service. It also often denotes a commitment to a range of ethical issues sometimes prescribed or assumed by the members of that profession. In the case of teachers, where there is a commitment to a set of values, which assume a common good for every student. This calls for the teacher to examine professional practice, from a moral and ethical standpoint. The *guiding principles*, defined by stakeholders in *chapter 5*, might be described as an example of the how moral and ethical issues impinge of practice.

A second imperative is the environmental one. Providers of education are in a dynamic interaction with the society and community they serve. That environment is becoming increasingly quality conscious and so if providers are to be genuinely responsive, they need increasingly to be aware of and respond to quality issues. Employers and external agencies are using the vocabulary and processes of quality and there are increasing concern for the rights of citizens and consumers.

A third imperative is the survival imperative. The customer driven approach is a pragmatic response to ensuring continuing recruitment, and so there must therefore be a genuine response to satisfying customer needs and expectations. Without this recognition, customers may well see the provision aloof, and uninteresting and irrelevant and may go elsewhere.

Finally, Sallis talks about the accountability imperative. Increasingly emphasis on outside inspection, reporting and monitoring requires the development of internal strategies to generate appropriate data and processes, which will accommodate and incorporate reporting and inspection procedures. If reporting and inspection are seen as ways of responding to customer requirements, then they will become implicit to organisational processes rather than an alien activity.

The net result of these imperatives is that providers see themselves as part of their communities, not in the sense of identifying and providing services they consider appropriate, but rather in meeting the needs and requirements as specified by that community. Van den Berghe (1995) says that the apparently irreversible quality movement in education and training has not yet lead to a strong convergence of the definition of quality itself. Many may agree that *effectiveness of learning* is the concept, which comes closest to most quality views. A problem with this definition is that it suggests quality in education is merely the result of the individual's learning or customer satisfaction, rather than social or economic process. This is not usually the case and we shall see later political ideologies, often expressed through policies, have a major role to play in shaping quality measurement.

A further benefit of adopting a quality approach is said to be that it transforms the organisation. Transformational quality is achieved by establishing customer requirements and then building structures and an organisational culture which enable staff to meet them; it sees continuous improvement at the very heart of maintaining quality. It concentrates on *excellence* and not just *fitness for purpose*.

In educational terms a transformational culture is a function of staff motivation and leadership wedded to a learner-centred philosophy. The concept of *total quality management* in education therefore offers a philosophy which emphasises the need for continuous improvement in the design and delivery of services. This involves the whole ethos of an organisation. Individuals are encouraged to assume greater responsibility for the quality of the work they produce and consultation with *customers* is emphasised.

The reason for distinguishing between the *procedural* and the *transformational* aspect of quality, are to recognise that adherence to exclusively one or another, produces a quality assurance system that is characterised on the one hand by a focus on *institutional procedure* and on the other by *customer care*. Education systems avoid this dilemma to some extent by separating the different purposes and developing quality approaches for each of them, typically of a different nature. So student views or customer satisfaction is often seen as distinctive from tutors developing a transformed curriculum. The problem is that this does not produce an integrated quality approach and leaves the question of adequacy or balance unanswered. From a practical and pragmatic viewpoint it is more useful to consider the different elements that contribute to education quality than the definition itself.

4.5 Conflicting views about quality

The UK's *Institute for Adult Continuing Education* (NIACE) has for some time recognised the importance of focussing on quality to enable individuals to know what they can expect. The NIACE's policy discussion paper (93:44) states:

'We wish to see more rapid acceptance of quality principles in all sectors, and urge...tough criteria for quality assurance'.

NIACE stresses the need for national systems of quality to develop benchmarks for evaluating success. The increasing importance of the consumer in education in contributing to curriculum design and management is recognised. Uden (94:45) says:

'If the individual is to make a higher personal investment in education and training...then they are likely to become more vociferous and more demanding in terms of getting "value for money". This could well mean that the traditional hierarchical structure of supply-led education and training could begin to give way to a more egalitarian, demand-led system where the key is partnership between recipient and provider.'

However the case for more involvement of the consumer in education has not been matched by the development of quality management, which puts the learner at the heart of the decision making process, in partnership with other stakeholders. The role of the individual learner in deciding policy and practice has not been central to government thinking. In the next chapter, we will see the possible benefits of involving the consumer or learner in the quality debate.

The current focus on quality of education and training provision in the UK has also to a large extent focussed on formal providers of education and training. There is now a plethora of custodians of quality legitimised by government policy. Terms such as *quality assurance, quality control, validation and examination, external assessment, quality audit, management* etc; have become part of the educational vernacular and are also being applied throughout the public, private and voluntary sectors. While such concepts may not have yet become part of the ABE language and culture, it would seem that they are likely to become more so in the future.

In a very short space of time, a minor quality industry has grown up creating an increasing bureaucratic load on those responsible for the actual delivery of education and training.

We have seen that there is no shortage of models for quality management. What is less clear in the literature is the contested nature of quality. Quality is a concept, which has tensions within it. Tensions exist between demands for external accountability and processes for internal improvements, between the idea of a *gold standard* or of something that is merely fit for purpose, between absolute standards and norm- referenced standards, between assessment of inputs and outputs, and between responsive or strategic processes.

Armstrong (2000) states that the most important issue in quality is agreeing what we are trying to measure. Traditional models of quality, he says, tend to emphasise efficiency and effectiveness. In the 1980s and throughout most of the 1990s, there was a definite focus on *economic efficiency*. Economy is the most simplistic, asking merely *what does it cost?* Reducing the costs of inputs was seen as the most important factor even if it meant a reduction in effectiveness. Armstrong also points out that a focus on economic efficiency did not appear to contribute to an upturn in economic fortunes either of a nation or individuals, or to the enhancement of the life chances of a significant proportion of the population. He says that if anything it may well have reduced the *social capital* and life satisfaction of a vast proportion of the population, whose experience of learning was restricted to *instrumental skills-based learning* leading to qualification outcomes, but not necessarily employment. Inevitably what is required is a trade off between *efficiency, economy and effectiveness*. Armstrong, (2000:3) says that in considering the balance between efficiency, economy and effectiveness we should also add *equality or equity, ethics and environment* to the equation.

Armstrong cautions about defining quality simply as *fitness for purpose* where a product or a service may be considered of *quality* if it is effective in meeting its specified purpose. In this model aims and objectives of learning programmes become pivotal to the discourse of quality assurance. Did the learning serve its purpose? If so, then it may be considered to be of quality.

Armstrong mentions two considerations that reflect the over-simplistic nature of the *fitness for purpose* model. The first is that there is often a difference between the specified aims and objectives as seen by the learning providers, and those of the learners who undertake a course of study. In practice this means that learners may feel satisfied with a learning programme because it meets their needs, whereas, measured by the specified aims and objectives, the programme might be considered to be failing. Conversely, a learning programme may be able to demonstrate it has achieved its aims, but leave learners feeling dissatisfied. Yet this leads to a assumptions being made about *performance* or *quality* indicators that may prove to be unwarranted.

The second consideration, he says, revolves around whether quality assurance expects providers ‘*to satisfy all learners all the time, most of the learners most of the time, or some of the learners some of the time.*’ The issue here is to do with diversity. It is well recognised that adult learners participating in a learning programme do so for a diverse range of purposes and reasons. The standardisation of the definition of quality then becomes problematic. He argues that issues of *equality* or *equity* need to be introduced into the increasingly complex equation.

The distinction has implications that impact on quality. In terms of equal opportunities, the assumption is that we should be able to widen participation to provide equal access for all. However, access in itself is not sufficient, as the current vogue for widening participation is making apparent. If there is to be equality of opportunity for achievement, more needs to be done in terms of providing learning support over and beyond the common curriculum. This may well mean providing additional resources for some individuals or groups rather than others. Those with positive prior learning experiences tend to accumulate more. The resources need to be directed at those who previously have had negative experiences of learning.

This has implications for determining what constitutes quality. If learning is efficient, but only effective for a minority, then its quality is problematic on the grounds of failing to contribute to equality. There can be no quality without equality.

One might also ask whether given the variation of interpretations about quality, is it even possible to have agreement about what quality is. Is quality in the eye of the beholder? The idea that there can be global agreement on definitions of quality is mistaken. Armstrong comments (00:4)

'All definitions are invariably situated in a context, and a reflection of the interactions between a range of agencies, including the individual learner whose needs and expectations form part of the equation. The definitions are a cultural product and are underpinned by cultural values. In short, there is always an ideological as well as an ethical basis to definitions of quality.'

It is also difficult to see how anyone can ever be entirely satisfied with the quality of anything. We can always potentially do better and so there is no end to quality assurance and assessment. Seen in this light, the current concern with quality may, in reality, be in part to do with control or management.

So in ABE practice it may be that what is meant by quality will vary depending on a range of circumstances including definitions of literacy, ethics and values, political and economic ideologies. It could be argued quality cannot be understood or defined outside this local frame of reference. However, the dilemma for the educator is that unless there is some broad agreement about what constitutes quality, it is difficult to bring about any degree of standardisation in its measurement.

Two distinct positions about quality have emerged. At one end of the scale, lifelong learning providers can claim that they are quality providers and have the right to define quality. At the other end, governments want to define what counts as quality and argue that we need to standardise and compare between providers, so that we can not only measure quality as perceived by the provider but also determine best practice.

One of the first problems in discussing quality has been the resistance of adult educators to it. This resistance has come about because models of quality assurance have been imposed on the sectors rather than being encouraged to emerge from within. Armstrong (00:1) notes that in the UK the government agenda and the targeting of resources have tended to influence the approaches to managing quality that have emerged. He comments:

'These models have not necessarily been the most appropriate for learning 'industries' – and it has often been an industrial model of quality assurance that has been promoted, with its cult of measurement and a culture of accountability. Moreover, the linking of quality to funding has exacerbated the resistance. Funding arrangements have given those providers of quality education a larger share of the distribution of resources. This means, of course, that those deemed not to be providing quality education have been penalised by being given fewer resources. There is an inevitable and increasing divide between those who provide 'quality' provision and those who do not. Those who benefit from this arrangement are often content with the systems in place. Those who suffer from the inequity of the system are those seen to complain or be cynical about quality.'

Armstrong is cynical about quality processes in the UK:

'the bureaucracy, the imprecision and lack of validity of measurement tools, and above all the diversion of resources that could contribute to quality improvement being channelled into the demonstration that quality exists. That this takes up a disproportionate amount of time and resources, and diverts attention away from the provision of learning and leads to the paradox that in meeting the requirements of quality assurance procedures, the quality of learning and the experience of learners are diminished.'

Armstrong questions whether these systems of monitoring, inspection and accountability, ensure that learners receive the best quality service that institutions are able to provide, within the constraints of funding and distribution of scarce resources.

Discussions about quality in ABE are taking place against a backdrop of cynicism and controversy. Nevertheless there is an acknowledgement by everyone that a focus on quality issues in ABE is important and there is an acknowledgement of a need to develop a culture, which accepts and fosters investment. This inevitable means the development of a quality-conscious culture.

4.6 The learner as a customer or stakeholder

More attention is being paid to the needs of the learner or customer in education and this raises the question about what role the customer should play in the learning process.

One of the problems in putting the customer at the centre of the equation is determining who the customer really is. Often the cost of education, or at least part of it, is met by someone else other than the learner - the employer, the education authority or the institution itself. These customers might rightly claim they have an interest in quality and should be involved in the process of constructing a quality system and managing it. The fact that there are so many stakeholders in education means that the assessment of quality is not just simply the concern of the learner or consumer. It is indisputable that the learner is a stakeholder whose perceived needs and views should be taken into account. The learner therefore might be said to have a key role to play in the quality debate.

In business and industry, quality controls put the client at the centre of every judgement. In business *quality is measurable by client satisfaction*. However, when applied to the education context this is problematic. If this concept is applied to education, it would seem that an educational programme has met a sufficiently high standard of quality if learners are satisfied. A question however arises as to what extent the learner can determine the quality of a programme if the learning is entirely new to the learner? Is the learner a reliable person to assess the quality of the course? An adult learner may be able to decide which programme he or she wants to subscribe to, and it is of course important that the programme is tuned to the appropriate level of knowledge, the experiences and the needs of clients, if the programme is to be successful. However, there are many ways of developing a curriculum, and many possible ways of meeting the needs of individual learners. Most programmes have many learners and it is not possible to meet the particular needs of everyone, therefore many learners may not be satisfied throughout the learning process or at the end of it.

Questions about who determines an educational programme, who assesses its quality and what standards are applied are all-important issues in the quality debate. Should it be the programme manager or teacher who makes the decisions about the programme on the basis of his/her knowledge, skills, previous experience, or is it the adult learner? If it is the learner, how would he/she make such a judgement? The learner should have some knowledge not just in making choices, but in evaluating standards of programmes.

Houben (1992) asks to what extent evaluation or quality should be grounded in learner satisfaction. He notes that in everyday life-worlds, people give meaning to their actions and experiences by putting these within a coherent structure of meanings, opinions, judgements or frame of reference. These frames of reference are not only the starting point of all interactions with the world but often of all action, social behaviour, thinking, feeling and, of course, learning. Wildemeersch & Leirman (1988) say these structures function as a kind of life-world, a safe home-base for ideas, opinions, habits, wishes, needs, contacts, encounters, conversation, new experiences which is taken for granted and not to be questioned. Houben notes that most people frame their world in a cognitive-instrumental way. He mentions Habermas (1981) and Kunneman (1985) who argue that we experience a colonisation of the life-world, which means that most people frame it in a cognitive-instrumental way rather than from other forms of rationality, like the moral and practical. We superimpose our understandings of the functioning of the state and the market on all domains of life and we attach an almost mythical value to the free market, modern science, technology etc;

Translating this into the educational field, he argues that such an approach results in an orientation which pays attention to predominantly instrumental needs such as qualifications. People want to learn something because it is useful, because it is significant for the job or social status. Customers therefore ask themselves the questions what is in it for me? Providers offer what people ask for, in a business-like fashion and without social criticism. In the eyes of the learner qualifications are perceived as very important for their self-esteem and social and professional position in society. Knowledge and skills rather than opinions or attitudes are seen as important. As a result of the importance of cognitive-instrumental rationality, most educational programmes do not meet the standards of experiential learning defined as:

'the process whereby people, individually and in association with others, engage in direct encounter and then purposefully reflect upon, validate, transfer, give personal meaning to, and seek to integrate their different ways of knowing.' (Weil and McGill, 1989)

Houben (1992) links the concept of quality in educational contexts to the notion of experiential learning. Quality he says, depends on reaching a certain level of reflection and critical responsibility in educational processes and it is very difficult to achieve real experiential learning because of the

colonisation of the life-worlds which do not have reflection, confrontation of ideas, and dialogue as needs. The dominance of cognitive instrumental thinking as opposed to moral-practical rationality in society and in our everyday life means that people have a particular idea of what they want and they drop out or judge the programme as poor quality if it doesn't meet their idea. So the dichotomy between liberal adult education or socio-cultural education as opposed to vocational education leads to different types of goals. The goal may be purely utilitarian rather than emancipatory or reflective. So, in this context, it might be argued that educational programmes are good when they trigger processes that appeal to the learning person as a whole-his/her feelings, thoughts, actions, opinions judgements etc.-even when this person expresses no need whatsoever to reflect on these issues. Houben (92:10) questions whether such assumptions are outdated and perhaps the search for new frames of reference tends to be taken over by the market. The quality agenda may be more influenced by utilitarian concerns rather than the *experiential learning*. He asks the question:

"Should we ban the non-instrumental, moral aspects from our courses, because they might threaten the learner, and adapt ourselves to market principles, considering client-satisfaction as the main objective?"

This raises the question as to what extent we allow ethical views to direct our profession. Do we have to make a clear distinction between cognitive-instrumentally orientated courses and others which appeal to the person as a whole? He also refers to the need for the educator to be concerned with the learner as a whole.

'In an educational situation, you want to address the learner as a whole, including all his capabilities and abilities. Quality means that you manage to improve his or her cognitive-instrumental abilities by means of well-elaborated programmes which, in terms of effectiveness and efficiency, result in measurable changes in knowledge and skills responding to the needs of the clients or learners. It also implies that you proceed in a way that the learners are invited to question their self-concepts, their ways of functioning in society, their opinions, their own frames of reference, and are prepared to start a dialogue on their experiences.' (92:10)

This may mean that a good programme may also have unsatisfied clients. Houben re-frames this question by asking whether indeed the clients are too easily satisfied, and points out that we must be aware of the fact that a client may prefer a programme of a lesser quality than we would like to offer. This may be a problem for educationalists in determining quality in a free market. Image building in marketing may be more important than the quality of the educational programme.

'In a free market-economy crowded with education salesmen it seems to have become more important for a curriculum to look good than to be good.'

4.7 Quality and adult basic education

A glance at recent government reports in the UK and Ireland shows that quality is more and more seen as an important issue in education. Speaking about quality the Kennedy Report (1997) says that:

'the quality of teaching for new learners is not of a universally "good" quality' and notes 'a worsening of inspection grades on basic skills courses in the college sector. The reason for this include the recruitment of inexperienced teachers, a lack of support for the expanding numbers of part-time teachers, and insufficient sharing of learning materials amongst teachers' (97:82).

It highlights the need to invest in teacher qualifications to ensure good quality education. The report (97:84) identifies characteristics of good practice in widening participation. These include effective marketing, having strategies for contacting non-participants, good quality information and guidance, effective support for learning, financial and practical support, a relevant curriculum which enables students to progress, effective teaching and promotion of learning, recording achievements, and keeping accurate management information.

The report (98:87) highlights the need for standards to widen participation to be included in quality assessment and performance measurement. It suggests the introduction of national standards that will ensure systematic and consistent approaches. It recommends setting performance indicators for

widening participation among underrepresented groups which should be decided by providers at local level as they will vary from area to area.

Both the *Learning Age* report (1998) and the White Paper *Learning to Succeed* (1999) policy documents are examples of recent UK Government papers on lifelong learning which emphasise the importance of quality.

The Learning Age report says (98:57) the UK must aim for world-class standards in the contemporary world.

'Wherever and whenever people and business choose to learn, they should be entitled to high quality learning that delivers what it promises, gets them to their goals and takes them as high up the ladder of achievement as they are able to go.'

Similarly, the *Learning to Succeed* report (1999) notes that there is a need for quality standards to be supported by new rigorous, independent inspection arrangements, to disseminate excellence and to reward high quality in education.

In Northern Ireland, the policy document *Lifelong Learning: A New Learning Culture For All* (1999) also emphasises the need to sustain and improve the quality of provision to ensure good value for money. It also notes the need for an external dimension to quality so that learners, the government, industry and the general public can have confidence in the provision by whosoever it is (98:53).

In the Republic of Ireland, the Government White paper on *'Adult Education: Learning for Life'* (2000) also emphasises the need for quality assurance. In the Education Act of 1998 it notes there is a responsibility to ensure: *'that there is made available to each person a level and quality of education appropriate to meeting the needs and abilities of that person'* (00:163). It comments:

'A broad consensus is emerging within many member states of the EU that general assessments of how the system as a whole is functioning should be built on the foundation of self-assessment by... education centres. External evaluations provide an excellent validation of the institutions own judgement' (00:163).

It notes the importance of evaluation in ensuring that the many providers of lifelong learning remain highly responsive, dynamic, and effective in meeting the diverse and essential needs of its recipients.

In *Chapter 2*, I discussed the importance of *Moser Report* (1999) in highlighting the need to develop quality provision in ABE in the UK.¹

Each of the above reports places a particular emphasis on aspects of quality measurement and the weaknesses of the existing system. What is evident from all of the reports is the need to become more concerned about quality standards and to improve the present system of measurement. The reports are remarkably similar in their desire to see change, which is responsive to the needs of both tutors and learners. The need to reach agreement between the various stakeholders on what constitutes quality in ABE and how it can be measured is therefore implied by the comments made in these reports.

4.8 Setting standards and measuring success

One of the problems in defining quality in ABE is defining and understanding what it is we want to measure. Recent research in the USA has sought to identify what the ABE curriculum might be in the 21st century and to examine what adults need to know and be able to do. The results of this research are reported in the National Institute for Literacy's EFF report (2000) *'Equipped for the Future'*.² Sixteen *Equipped for the Future* (EFF) Standards were identified through a careful research process which began by looking at the changes in adults' daily lives as described by adults. The research sought to map the critical responsibilities of family and civic life as well as work life and identifying what constituted a foundation for success in coping with the complexities of contemporary life, building consensus first on what adults have to do in these roles and what effective performance looks like in different communities across the USA.³ Once the standards were defined they were refined to ensure that they could be used at every level to guide instruction, to assess and to ensure that tutors, adult

learners and other education professionals would understand what is most important to learn, without dictating how the ideas should be taught.

The standards not only relate to definition, but also to observation and measurement. The aim is to enable instructors not only to document performance but also to place it in a continuum and let students know if they are performing well enough to accomplish a desired goal. The standards define multiple levels of performance for students to strive for which are linked to differing goals in the adult's life. These will focus on what adults can do with the knowledge, including what external benchmarks are linked to each level. Finally the standards are written clearly for all stakeholders to understand and they keep in mind the multiple audiences that need to understand them.

'Our goal has been to write standards that are compelling enough to inspire adult learners, teachers, and tutors and clear enough to send a coherent message to policy makers and other stakeholders about what students know and are able to do if they meet EFF standards.' (00:17)

The report notes that the conception of what is to be assessed changed during the research process and that this has implications for defining quality assessment. Our conception of what skills an adult might need is rapidly changing. The report notes it may not be possible to rely on stakeholders alone to identify the skills and knowledge which adults will require. It is therefore important that policies encourage thinking by raising issues and by providing opportunities for training and development for all the stakeholders. In this way they will be better equipped to make decisions about what is necessary and the competing demands of the adult curriculum.

The *Equipped for the Future* standards reflect the dynamic nature of adult basic education. The world continues to change and definitions and standards of competencies will also change. The *Equipped for the Future* Standards define the core knowledge and skills adults need to carry effectively out their roles as parents, citizens, and workers. The standards focus on the knowledge and skills that enable adults to gain access to information and ideas, to communicate with confidence that their message makes sense and can be understood by others, to make decisions that are based on solid information reached through analysis and careful judgement, and to keep on learning.

The *Equipped for the Future* standards developed in the USA (2000) and the *Adult literacy Core Curriculum* developed in the UK (2001) provide evidence that it is possible to develop a quality standards with varying degrees of relevance to the lives of ABE learners and teachers. Significantly, the EFF standards note that it is not possible to rely on stakeholders alone to develop standards. This issue will be returned to in the discussion in *Chapter 5*.

All of these standards are currently being piloted, so it is not yet possible to compare findings with the findings from this study. The results may provide powerful evidence for developing quality assurance and for making comparisons between different approaches.

4.9 Overview

This chapter has examined the issue of quality, what it means in education and the implications for those involved with ABE. Quality in education is seen as a pressing issue that needs more attention. But there are several differing approaches each of which has overlapping and competing views. Many different variables are influencing our thinking and understanding which is constantly changing.

There has been much rhetoric about the importance of developing quality assurance systems for ABE and new approaches have already begun to emerge. The political agenda is encouraging the development of our thinking about quality, but it is also defining the way we should think and the kind of tools that are developed for measuring success. While the role of the consumer or learner in the process is recognised, there is little engagement with learners or discussion about how their views can be taken into account.

One of the problems in discussing quality and ABE is the differentiation between what goes on at the macro level or government and policy making level, and at the micro level or the level of management of local provision or projects, and at the interface with the customer. Issues such as breaking down barriers, flexibility, funding, advice, guidance and support, equal opportunities and access have emerged as key issues of concern. While there is a belief that all the stakeholders should share the task

of developing measures for quality, programmes are often set by government. It is also unclear whether quality is seen as that which employers and the economy need or that which learners will want.

Ahier and Esland (99:182) note that performance indicators to measure quality of provision are often set by national bodies:

'the agenda is set by the state and retained and controlled through its devolved regulatory systems. Each institution and provider has taken on responsibility for its own quality assurance system'

What seems important is to keep in mind that our understanding of quality is constantly changing. Definitions are (and should be) based on many things. The work of quality improvement is in one sense a collection of choices. While these choices may seem immensely difficult, the basic philosophy of improvement is that one set of choices are made and, after seeing them through, better choices can be made, based on experience gained. A first step may therefore be to agree what quality is. Only then is it possible to move on to assessing and improving quality.

In the following two chapters, *Chapter 5 and 6*, the issue of what constitutes quality in adult basic education is explored. In *Chapters 1-4* we have seen that there is a need to develop opportunities to improve literacy learning that will encourage a wider participation, particularly among adults who have not previously got involved. There is a need to develop quality provision, which takes account of need. The next chapter will examine the ingredients of quality provision in ABE and how its effectiveness can be measured.

¹ The Moser report notes that good quality teaching is delivering clearly structured teaching, providing for the acquisition of skills in a range of contexts, setting high expectations for learners' achievements, setting goals and plans for each learner, assessing and reviewing progress, enabling learners to gain credit and accreditation for their learning, enabling them to go on learning and adjusting the length of programme according to the level of skill required. It recommends the development of a coherent framework of standards across all programmes to ensure standards across programmes, funders and inspection regimes and the need for benchmarks, targets, and performance indicators which must be taken into account in developing quality of provision. It spells out the need for staff training and regular up-dating and the increased use of information and communication technologies to improve quality in the delivery of ABE. It says that there is a need for well trained staff who have regular opportunities for up-dating their knowledge and skills and for training teachers and volunteers who can teach in a variety of contexts. It notes there is evidence that programmes using well trained staff, who receive regular, professional up dating, achieve the best outcomes in terms of learner achievements (99:58) and notes the benefits of integrating ICT and ABE which it says provides a powerful motivation for adults with poor basic skills. It says few have used computers or related technology at school and it therefore does not evoke memories of struggle and failure and enables progress with writing skills to be achieved more quickly. The fact that it enables learners to develop multi media programmes, it says, increases the power of learning. It notes (99:60) that in Australia, the use of information and communication technology (ICT) led to increased output, a greater understanding of what producing written text involves, increased participation by learners and high levels of enthusiasm and interest.

² The research sought to understand what is needed to meet national goals for adult literacy and lifelong learning. The *Equipped for the Future (EFF)* framework and standards represent the results of a six years project to create a working consensus on what the goals of teaching and learning should be and are seen as important tools for building a strong customer-driven educational system that aligns its resources with achieving its stated goals. The EFF's definition was based on analysis of what adults do in their roles and workers, citizens, and members of families and communities. They have been refined through an iterative process of feedback, comment and testing which included learner involvement. As a result the standards reflect a broad and inclusive consensus on what is important for adults to know and do to be maximally effective in their daily lives.

³ The *Equipped for the Future* Report (2000) begins by noting how the demands of adult life have changed with a greater focus in education not just on mechanical skills but the ability to think critically. It notes in the early part of the twentieth century education focused on the acquisition of literacy skills:

simple reading, writing, and calculating. It was not the general rule for educational systems to train people to think and read critically, to express themselves clearly and persuasively, to solve complex problems in science and mathematics. Now, at the end of the century, these aspects of *high literacy* are required of almost everyone in order to negotiate successfully the complexities of contemporary life (00:1). The skill demands for workers have increased dramatically, as has the need for organisations and workers to change in response to competitive workplace pressures. Thoughtful participation in the democratic process has also become increasingly complicated as the locus of attention has shifted from local to national and global concerns. Above all, information and knowledge are growing at a far more rapid rate than ever before in the history of humankind. The report states that meaning of knowing has shifted from being able to remember and repeat information to being able to find and use it.

Chapter 5: Participation and Success in ABE: Designing and Evaluating a Quality Framework.

'Provision and participation (in ABE) is patchy, it lacks coherence and co-ordination and is constrained by the unstable funding culture that prevails in Northern Ireland... there is inconsistency in programme quality assurance across the adult learning sector'

Basic Skills Unit for Northern Ireland. Raising Our Sights (2000:4)

'Basic Skills programmes must work to a clear and coherent framework of standards. These standards will enable us to establish new curricula, assessment tools, tests and new qualifications.'

Sir Claus Moser, Basic Skills Agency. Adult Basic Skills Standards: A Consultation (1999:2)

5.1 Background, Aims and Approaches

Earlier, we have seen how a growing awareness about the extent of need in ABE, expressed through international surveys and other research studies, has led to recognition of the need to expand and improve services. The new provision must be capable of increasing demand and of meeting the needs of disparate groups who have hitherto been untouched by existing provision. There has also been a corresponding interest in defining what it is that adults should be doing. In the UK, this has resulted in the setting up of quangos with a responsibility to develop the curriculum, to devise a quality framework and to benchmark standards for monitoring achievement resulting in the publication of new core standards for ABE. On the other hand this has not led to an inclusive approach in drawing up the agenda. Powerful groups that represent the managers and industrial interests have been charged with the responsibility of developing a common approach to quality and measuring standards. While this group has consulted with practitioners, it has not been involved in a dialogue that respects the views of all the stakeholders and its purpose has also been strongly influenced by a political agenda expressed through reports on educational policy etc. What it is that adults need to know and learn and the responsibility for defining the learning tasks is being mapped out by officials and bodies that cannot claim to represent consensus opinion. Planners and government officials take responsibility for making decisions about what will be taught, how it will be delivered, who will teach it, and how it will be evaluated. Input to the decision making process from tutors and learners appears marginal and their voice is having a minimal effect in influencing decisions. This *top-down* driven approach is driving the agenda for reform and is not, however, always in the best interests of those who work at the grass-roots or those who might benefit from ABE.

The debate about what ABE is for, the aims and goals of ABE services, and how new and creative solutions to the long standing problem of low participation and poor achievement might be developed, are seen as the responsibility of bureaucrats. The current political agenda, as expressed in government reports, is seen as the driving force for decisions. Increasing participation and success in ABE is, however, ultimately dependant on the attractiveness of services to learners, its ability to engage and satisfy the learner, and to encourage him/her to go on learning. In *Chapter 3* we saw the multiplicity of factors which might influence participation and, given the complexity of issues affecting the adult's ability to engage in learning, it seems likely that it will be difficult if not impossible to meet the needs of every single adult.

In this chapter, the findings from a study on quality in ABE are reported. The study engages ABE stakeholders in Northern Ireland, in a process that led to the development of a quality model, which was tested, using an agreed model for implementation. The research was carried out over a two year period (1998-2000) in two stages. The first stage, *Phase 1*, spanned a six month period (December 1998- May 1999), and developed a stakeholders' quality model for ABE. The second stage, *Phase 2*, lasted for five months (November 1999- March 2000), during which the evolving quality framework was piloted. The findings from Northern Ireland, also informed a European research project on *'Quality in ABE'*.¹

Studies reported in *chapter 3* identified barriers to participation and reported on ways in which these barriers might be broken down. This study takes these findings a step further, by developing and piloting a

model of practice intended to overcome perceived weaknesses in provision and in so doing to encourage wider participation and success. It proposes to achieve this by advocating a consensus approach to improvement that includes a sample of stakeholders in ABE - policy makers, managers, teachers or facilitators, and learners. In so doing, a kind of synergism is created, which enables a comprehensive evaluation model to emerge capable of measuring participation and success. The model's strength is conceived to derive from its ability to involve a wide cross-section of people with an interest in ABE in its construction. Through investigating the building blocks for measuring quality, issues that affect participation and success begin to emerge which have the support of a wide range of interest groups. The new model for measurement is therefore multi-focused and commands a wide degree of support for implementation. The model is then tested in different learning environments and findings are discussed.

The research also arises from the concern for a need to develop a new framework for the implementation of quality standards in ABE in Northern Ireland. As mentioned earlier, the report on the future of lifelong learning, *'Lifelong Learning: a New Learning Culture for All'* (99:53), highlights the need for sustaining and improving the quality of provision in Northern Ireland. A report of the BSU (00:4) also reinforced the need to focus on improving quality of provision.

This study was already underway when a new debate about quality and ABE began to emerge in the UK in 1999. As a result of recommendations of the *Moser Report*, the government launched a consultation document in the autumn of 1999, which has recently resulted in the publishing of a new core curriculum for ABE, *'Adult Literacy and the Core Curriculum'* (2001). It therefore provides another dimension to these findings and that of another study on quality emerging from the USA and reported in the previous chapter. Each of these studies were government-funded projects and could be said to be influenced by a particular agenda. It might also be argued that the quality study reported here was influenced by the agenda of the researcher. While every attempt was made by the researcher to remain neutral in the discussion about quality and to record and report only what participants said, it is also true that the agenda may have in build bias eg. the assumption that involving stakeholders in quality assurance is a good thing. This could be said to be true of any study. Certainly, strength of this study could be said to be that it was carried out independently of government funding and is not overtly influenced by government thinking. The views held by those who participated of course, may have been influenced by the views of their employers, and thus ultimately the political agenda of the time. Everyone entered discussions with specific understandings, meanings and goals for ABE. Sometimes the views expressed were the views of the individual and sometimes the views were drawn from the specific organisation which individuals represented. Some of the views were influenced by political agendas about ABE. The project did not seek to change the perceptions that participants brought to the research, though some discussion about literacy and quality agendas was inevitable and this may have influenced how individuals and groups began to think about issues. The research project sought to encourage participants to reflect on issues based on the existing process as they found it, and on how they felt it might be altered. The result is a wide variety of views and expectations, with some apparent contradictions. The aim was to develop a model or framework which would encapsulate the full richness of experience and would reflect only the views of the participants. While it has omissions or weakness the intention is to develop something that is inclusive and is capable of change.

The chapter reports on the methodology used in the study, the quality framework that emerged, and results from the implementation process. It was recognised from the outset that those participating in the research would require time to examine and discuss their experience of quality issues from their own working context and to exchange ideas with other providers. If a metamorphosis of thinking was to take place, it should be part of a process where new ideas are examined and tested. This would require the goodwill of participants, as there was not any special financial support available for teams to develop and test assumptions. With this in mind, it was decided to collect data in two stages. The stakeholders in ABE were asked to discuss issues affecting quality and success and to contribute to developing a common framework for measurement. A series of meetings was organised at various locations in Northern Ireland and these included representatives of those involved in policy and practice of ABE and from learner groups in ABE. Those attending these meetings came from a wide spectrum of provision and including representatives from 34 organisations. The implementation stage, *Phase 2 (1999-2000)* involved a total of 29 different organisations, 14 of which applied the framework. (A list of all participants is included in *annex 2*.)

The study was based on interviews that were used to gather data on the views of different stakeholders on a variety of issues about quality and ABE. The relevance and drawback of using qualitative approach were previously discussed in *Chapter 3*. A list of providers of ABE held by the *Northern Ireland Adult Literacy & Basic Education Committee* was used to enlist stakeholders from both the formal and non-formal sector in *Phase 1* of the research. These included representatives known to be active in ABE drawn from formal and non-formal provision. It included Colleges of Further Education and the training sector and those who considered themselves to be involved in ABE in the voluntary and community sector. Providers were written to and asked if they would like to contribute to the study. All of those who responded positively were then invited to attend a series of meetings held at different locations around Northern Ireland. Participation was voluntary and there was no requirement to get involved. In this way all those who did get involved did so because they genuinely interested and wanted to participate in the experiment. All those who actively participated in *Phase 1* were invited to continue in the *Phase 2*-implementation. Some of the providers chose not to continue and this is discussed later in *Phase 2*. Others who had not participated in *Phase 1*, asked if they could be included in *Phase 2*. All such requests were treated favourably.

The advantage of using self-selection was that all those who participated, did so because they really wanted to be involved. Many of those who participated had a lot of expertise and experience working in ABE. However, this had some disadvantages. For example, it meant that there was no control over the exact numbers of stakeholders participating, and sometimes meeting became rather large. This created a problem in involving everyone in discussion and maintaining intimacy with individuals. Where groups were large, participants were also encouraged to put their views down in writing and many did this. Some groups dropped out after the first meeting, but all gave good reason for not continuing their involvement. Lack of time and money to finance staff involvement were the most commonly given reasons for not being able to continue involvement. A further problem was ensuring a balanced involvement of stakeholders was achieved, which included policy makers, managers and practitioners. While the database included people working at all levels, there was a tendency for local organisers and tutors to respond positively to attending meetings and making written submissions. This problem was overcome by inviting stakeholders from the management and policy domain, to attend meetings and to make a formal input into the discussion groups (for example by giving a short presentation on a topic of interest). In this way the views of all of the stakeholders were safeguarded, and the interaction between people from all levels of provision preserved.

Learners were involved in different ways. Sometimes they met with their tutors individually or in groups to crystallise their views, which were then fed back into the project. Their views were then recorded in writing by the student or tutor and submitted to the project organiser. Learners were also invited to attend the meetings organised for stakeholders. The learners who participated were encouraged to do so by their tutors and they were largely those who took an active interest in ABE. Usually they were natural group spokespersons or leaders. Those attending stakeholder meetings were chosen according to their confidence and willingness to express opinions.

The roles of those interviewed varied considerably between organisations and this presented difficulties in categorising individuals into groups. At the policy making level there were also two distinct groups identified- ie those who develop policy at national level (usually located within government administrative structures), and those who develop policy within organisations. This project sought to represent the views of both these groups who are classified together in the table below.

In the colleges of further and higher education provision the roles of senior manager, middle manager, organiser and tutor were easily identified. In the voluntary or community sector the same person sometimes shared these roles. Individuals would sometimes describe themselves as a senior manager and coordinator or co-ordinator and tutor. Where a person appeared to have more than one role, their perceived primary role is recorded and this is indicated in *table 3* below. So each person is recorded only once in the statistics.

Table 3: Numbers of those interviewed in the *Evolving Quality Framework Study (1998-2000) for Adult Basic Education in Northern Ireland*.

GROUP	NOS	%
Policy makers/senior managers	17	20%
ABE coordinators /organisers	5	6%
Further Education College teachers/ tutors	11	13%
Community tutors	12	15%
Training organisation tutors	7	9%
Volunteer tutors	14	17%
Learners (directly consulted by the researcher)	17	20%
Total	83	100%

Nos = Total numbers interviewed for group.

The numbers above represent those who attended meetings where the researcher was present as outlined in *chapter 5*. The largest group consulted was those involved in teaching (ie tutors and volunteers). The numbers of those involved from each sector also tends to reflect their overall numbers within the sector. For example, more people were involved from colleges than from the training sector because they represent a bigger share of the market in ABE.

Those who attended the project briefings were invited to organise additional meetings in the workplace or learning environment and to bring back information to future meetings or to send written reports summarising the findings from the issues discussed. They were not asked to record attendances at these meetings, as it was felt that for a number of reasons this could be counterproductive to an open and frank dialogue. Some organised general meetings, while other had separate meetings between tutors and learners. Some noted meetings with groups of between 10 and 15 people while others said that only a few members were consulted. As the researcher was not present at these meetings, the information has been accepted on trust. The local teams later provided oral accounts of these meetings when they met with the researcher in the larger group. Some centres also forwarded written accounts of these meetings.

5.2 Phase 1: Development of a framework for adult basic education

The objectives of *Phase 1* of the research study were as follows:

- to raise awareness amongst a sample group of providers and participants about the desire to have an evaluation process appropriate to the needs of the adult learner
- to establish criteria for assessment of ABE provision which would be acceptable as good practice by everyone
- to develop expertise among participating groups in the development and implementation of quality standards
- to develop an implementation strategy to enhance the quality of ABE

The determination that a quality assurance framework for ABE should be developed by all the stakeholders in the region, emerged from a concern that quality assurance systems in use in other contexts, would fail to capture the full richness of the ABE experience as described by learners themselves. This fear centred on the use of quantitative indicators which, when used alone, would focus on aspects important to managers who needed to demonstrate accountability, at the expense of conveying the rich fabric of the learning experience. It also resulted from worries about focusing on technical skills, and in so doing, not reflecting the breadth of the learning experience of the adult.

The research carried out in the first phase, sought to address these anxieties by asking various stakeholders what quality assurance in ABE meant to them. An example, taken from the experience of the respondents, highlights the contrasting responses that were given. For managers funding was seen as the top priority of a quality service, for tutors teaching and learning resources were most important, and for learners, the quality of the teacher-tutor relationship and the social dimension of learning were the most frequently mentioned factors.

These viewpoints provide an overview of key aspects of a quality ABE service, which can be paraphrased as funding enough to provide resources for tutors, and the tools and interpersonal skills to promote learning in a socially inclusive atmosphere. By maintaining an inclusive approach to development, it was anticipated that collaboration would produce a broad commitment to a quality framework, which would facilitate its implementation. There was one particular disadvantage evident in this approach. In the first phase of the research, the stakeholders suggested aspects of quality that were seen as important in their own work contexts. However other aspects such as the importance of communication, learning how to learn, self-assessment and self-evaluation, necessary to provide a strong educational grounding for the evolving quality framework, were missing. The model allows for such omissions to be addressed at a later stage of development, and it was expected that the second phase or any subsequent work on implementation would highlight such omissions, provide suggestions for further quality measures, and propose adaptations to existing ones.

A common framework for evaluating policy and practice in ABE programmes was developed as a result of extensive consultation with policy makers, managers, tutors and learners. As a result of these discussions, a comprehensive quality framework emerged. The chapter contains the results of consultations with stakeholders in the North of Ireland with a range of people from the formal and non-formal learning contexts. It also reports on the views of ABE learners on aspects of provision, which they considered essential and the kind of questions they raised. This then leads to the presentation of a common framework. The Northern Ireland framework was later assimilated with findings from similar research carried out by two of the other European project partners in their regions and a common integrated framework was developed. Findings were presented at an international seminar in Dublin attended by representatives from the other socrates project partners at the end of the first phase. The models that emerged from each region were found to be surprisingly similar. Some additional factors were stressed in other regions. For example, the guiding principle of ABE as a basic human right emerged from discussions in Belgium, the need to provide one to one tuition and to ensure the voluntary principle of attendance arose in the Republic of Ireland. The importance of acknowledging cultural difference was a factor that was stressed in Northern Ireland.

5.2.1 The consultation process

The consultation process in *Phase 1* took place in an atmosphere of developing interest in adult education following the publication of the policy for Northern Ireland, '*Lifelong Learning, A New Learning Culture for All*' (1999). The recommendation to establish a Basic Skills Unit offered a sense of encouragement to ABE staff. Invitations to discuss quality issues were positively received. The consultations were organised in stages. The objectives of the first stage were to provide information about the research, to gather information about policies relating to quality assurance in Northern Ireland and to obtain an overview of any quality assurance systems used to measure ABE in Northern Ireland.

The first strand of meetings included a one day workshop in Belfast in early March 1999. This meeting provided an opportunity for interested groups to meet together and to share information about quality assurance in formal and non-formal learning environments for example colleges, training centres, and in voluntary and community groups. Representatives from the *Department of Education*, the *Educational Guidance Service for Adults* (EGSA), the *Northern Ireland EU funded Peace and Reconciliation programme*, and the *ABE Support Service* (ABESS), shared information about quality systems already in place and their vision for a quality framework information gathered from this meeting is summarised below.²

The second strand included three meetings, each lasting a half-day, in three other locations, at Belfast, Londonderry and Armagh.³ These meetings were with groups of managers and practitioners involved in the delivery of ABE at the local level. The purpose of these meetings was to provide information about the research project, to examine information about quality approaches already in use, and to share information with each other about existing approaches to quality and its measurement. At the meetings participants were also asked to consider a series of questions about their understanding of quality in ABE and what elements they felt should be included in measurement and they were also invited to discuss issues further with their colleagues and to report back on their findings.⁴ A number took up this option and submitted further written evidence, which was incorporated into the framework. The questions were drawn up by the researcher and were carefully explained and provided in writing to each participant at the meetings. Participants were given the opportunity to ask for more information or to seek clarity about the questions. The questions were open-ended and were intended to encourage the group members to begin to discuss quality and how to measure it. Discussion took place in small groups and the researcher noted down the responses of each participant. The comments were later collated into an overall report of findings from each meeting, and eventually all comments were put together to develop a framework. The responses from these discussions are reported below.

5.2.2 The views of senior managers and co-ordinators of adult basic education. (Strand 1)

Discussions in *Strand 1* involved the representatives from co-ordinating bodies with an interest in ABE. It provided useful hard data about how these groups viewed quality and what procedures were already in place for measuring quality.

Representatives from the *DENI* highlighted the department's interest in promoting quality in education. This is largely through its inspection procedures, which have the aim of promoting the highest possible standards of learning and teaching through monitoring and reporting on the outcomes of provision in the formal and non-formal provision which it funds (colleges and training organisations, youth service etc;). Its view was that quality assurance is designed to serve two purposes. Firstly, to ensure providers monitor and evaluate their performance continually and systematically and, secondly, to provide essential information that will inform decision-making and choice. To serve these purposes it requires that the quality assurance procedures must have an internal and external dimension, and an appropriate balance established between the use of quantitative and qualitative indicators. The internal dimension is the responsibility of the provider and the external dimension is the responsibility of the department.

In addition to general quality assessment, an ABE quality mark introduced by the Basic Skills Agency has been available since 1992. This mark focuses mainly on entitlement – i.e. what someone joining an ABE programme might expect to get. Many ABE programmes such as those organised by colleges, adult and community education centres, training providers, prisons and voluntary organisations, have made use of this quality mark. In 1998, the quality mark was revised and updated. Some of the Northern Ireland centres offering ABE use these standards for measuring performance.

The *Educational Guidance Service for Adults (EGSA)* has responsibility for guidance of students into ABE, co-ordinating the Basic Skill Unit for Northern Ireland, and administering the allocation of *Peace and Reconciliation* funding in Northern Ireland for the European Community. It has therefore a pivotal role to play in ensuring that adults from disadvantaged backgrounds get onto the right course. The European Commission's monitoring and evaluation requirements for '*Improving Accessibility and Quality of Training, Education and Employment Services*' is used to monitor the quality of projects funded under this programme and groups funded are required to monitor and evaluate provision. National guidelines for the monitoring of guidance are being developed and EGSA is currently involved in a pilot study of quality standards for adult guidance. Finally, the *Adult Basic Education Support Service (ABESS)*, managed by EGSA, plays a monitoring role for ABE. By tracking learners from referral to taking up a place in ABE, it is informing quality evaluation in the statutory, voluntary and community sector about their effectiveness in placing learners on relevant programmes.

The *Workers' Education Association* is a voluntary group, which exists to make education accessible to those most removed from the educational experience, including ABE learners. Its aims and goals are

described in *Chapter 2*. The Workers' Education Association (WEA) can be summarised by reference to its development plan, *Learning Together*. The WEA proposes to create a *charter for learners* outlining what a person can expect and what is expected of a person enrolling in a WEA class. In addition to its proposed charter for learners, it sees the management of human resources as equally important, and is committed to the achievement of recognition through the quality model *Investors in People*. It is also mounting a staff development programme for tutors and for its management committee.

The discussions revealed important information about how policy-makers, managers and co-ordinators think about quality. They showed that sometimes quality models were developed from guidelines laid down by other bodies or funders, and sometimes they were the result of internal agreements on monitoring performance. What was evident was that everyone had a view about quality and how it should be measured. Clearly a quality culture is having an impact on every organisation, with many organisations required to follow formalised guidelines but even where this was not the case an interest in promoting quality was detected. All of the quality models examined were models with a general applicability across the education sector, rather than models specific to ABE. A variety of quality assurance systems were being used in centres where ABE was being delivered but all of these were quality models that were general and not specific to ABE. For example, *Investors in People*, the *Business Excellence Model*, the *BSA Quality Mark ISO 9000* etc.

The consultations showed that senior managers saw quality as a tool for assessing competence in meeting organisational and management objectives or adhering to quality standards that are already laid down. Discussions did not show that managers saw a focus on quality as an opportunity to develop new ways of thinking or enhance knowledge about what was happening in the organisation or how it might develop. While approaches to quality management were quite varied they tended to be bureaucratic, formalised, and originating from the top of the organisation. The emphasis was on demonstrating competence and satisfying criteria laid down by funders or upper layers of bureaucracy. The deliberations also provided information on what issues might be included in a stakeholders' model for quality in ABE. These factors will be discussed later.

Even though co-ordinating bodies laid down criteria for measuring approaches, there was no consistency in approaches used. The discussions provided illuminating evidence about how senior managers valued existing models, from those who had first-hand experience of using them. Everyone felt that a model, which was ABE-focused, would be useful and everyone was willing to contribute to discussion about what such a model should include. Their comments therefore assisted the construction of the model described later in this chapter.

5.2.3 The views of middle managers, organisers, tutors and learners (Strand 2)

The aim of the second strand of interviews was to consult as widely as possible with stakeholders delivering ABE at local level, to find out their views about quality, and include these in the emerging framework. Meetings were convened with group representatives from a variety of formal and non-formal provisions such as colleges, community providers etc. These meetings brought together individuals from groups holding widely different perspectives. There was a wide-ranging discussion on a range of issues such as what participants understood by quality, teaching and learning methods, learner and tutor accreditation, flexibility of provision, and the need for community consultation. The information gleaned from these discussions was then collated and fed into the emerging framework. Issues raised in discussions were recorded, analysed, and categorised under headings and used to develop an agreed quality assurance framework for ABE. While some of the issues raised were common to everyone, some issues were emphasised by particular groups. The following is a summary of the key issues raised.

5.2.4 Views of stakeholders

It is difficult to generalise about findings as contrasting views emerged from consultations in different areas and from the differing perspectives of stakeholders. The issues highlighted by organisers in rural communities centred on distance to travel, maintaining confidentiality, learner or tutor dependency, and publicity and recruitment methods. Because travel distances were so great tutors felt isolated and the only opportunity to meet to discuss issues of common concern was during training.

Those working in the statutory sector have different concerns. Here the ABE service is undergoing a process where informal procedures, are now being formalised and recorded to meet quality assurance measures and to gain funding. This gives cause for anxiety as the demand for more formalised individualised learning programmes increases. The development of individual learning plans is costly in terms of time and staff feels the time commitment necessary has not been recognised. One major cause of tension expressed to researchers arises from the required method of reporting and many expressed concerns that funding may become linked to compulsory accreditation for all ABE learners.

There was a general interest and desire to provide a quality ABE service and to support the development of an agreed quality framework, but many felt that time and cost to implement such a framework would be prohibitive.

5.2.5 The managers' perspectives

The managers consulted emphasised the need to have support from the top of their organisation. Policies needed to be incorporated into the mission statement and the institutional development plan and similarly documented at each level of responsibility. Recommendations from project teams and relevant data from internal audits, quality assurance procedures and market research activities needed to be analysed and a response made. But in order to carry out analysis, adequate human and physical resources were necessary.

The managers interviewed believed that a change of culture was needed to enable development in the ABE field. Over-reliance on part-time volunteer tutoring mean that it was difficult to develop adult basic education provision; standards could vary and difficulties arose over responsibility in the case of a complaint. More funding should be made available for the training of full-time staff to deliver provision. This would raise the status of the work and help to end the isolation of learners and it could also help to gain access to better premises and a broader range of resources.

5.2.6 The tutors' perspectives

Tutors emphasised the need for sufficient time for learners to develop confidence and skills. They also felt it was needed to enable them to observe, to learn from good practice, and to develop high quality resources. Sufficient time, they said, was necessary to liaise, to network, to form partnerships with outside agencies and to keep abreast of developments in ABE.

Financial arrangements, it was felt, could be more responsive to the needs of ABE students. Appropriate support from senior managers and policy makers was seen as vital to widening participation. They emphasised a need for guidance to assist the learner to address tension between expectations and needs. The emphasis on accreditation when not all learners wanted it was seen as detrimental to progress.

When asked about what they thought ABE included, most tutors included information technology in their definition. IT was seen as a useful motivator, capable of overcoming notions of stigma associated with literacy. In some centres, however, there was a difficulty in gaining access to computers for learners. In some cases, it was felt that volunteer tutors find access to computers and other technologies difficult.

Volunteer tutors were seen as isolated and not fully integrated into the life of the centre. This meant that the tutor was limited in how s/he could help the learner, who was also felt the effects of this isolation. Learners expressed anxiety about confidentiality being compromised and tutors did not know how to help learners overcome this problem. The availability of accredited training for volunteer tutors meant that

many were moving on to paid work, often in another centre. There was often a need for constant training of volunteer tutors who often did not stay long in work. The training too was generally felt to be inadequate. For example, the growing numbers of students with particular needs such as dyslexia has meant that tutors need broader and longer training and constant updating, but this was often not available.

5.2.7 The learners' perspectives

Interviews with learners revealed that the tutor/learner relationship is of paramount importance. Learners felt that tutors should be experienced, have appropriate qualifications and be easy to talk to. Learners said they liked to have control over what is learned and are involved in decision-making. '*Taster sessions*', '*meet the tutor sessions*' and '*high profile award ceremonies*' were seen as useful methods of developing a positive image of ABE and were different from their experience attending school. Being an adult learner was seen as different and adults indicated they liked to know they would be treated as an adult. Social interaction with others in the group was also viewed as important. The learning atmosphere created at the place of learning was said to be important. Learners commented on the need for a pleasant environment to work in and one where it was not necessary to meet in a different place each time, as being important in encouraging participation.

Women returning to study said that there was a need to be aware of the effects of some people having caring responsibilities, for example children, when organising times of classes. The timing of classes should take account of school start and finish times, lunch times, half days and holidays, and employment patterns such as shift work on the other. Learners felt costs should be kept to a minimum and free where possible and when costs are unavoidable easy payment options should be offered. Availability of crèche facilities, longer classes and better information about classes were all things which concerned learners.

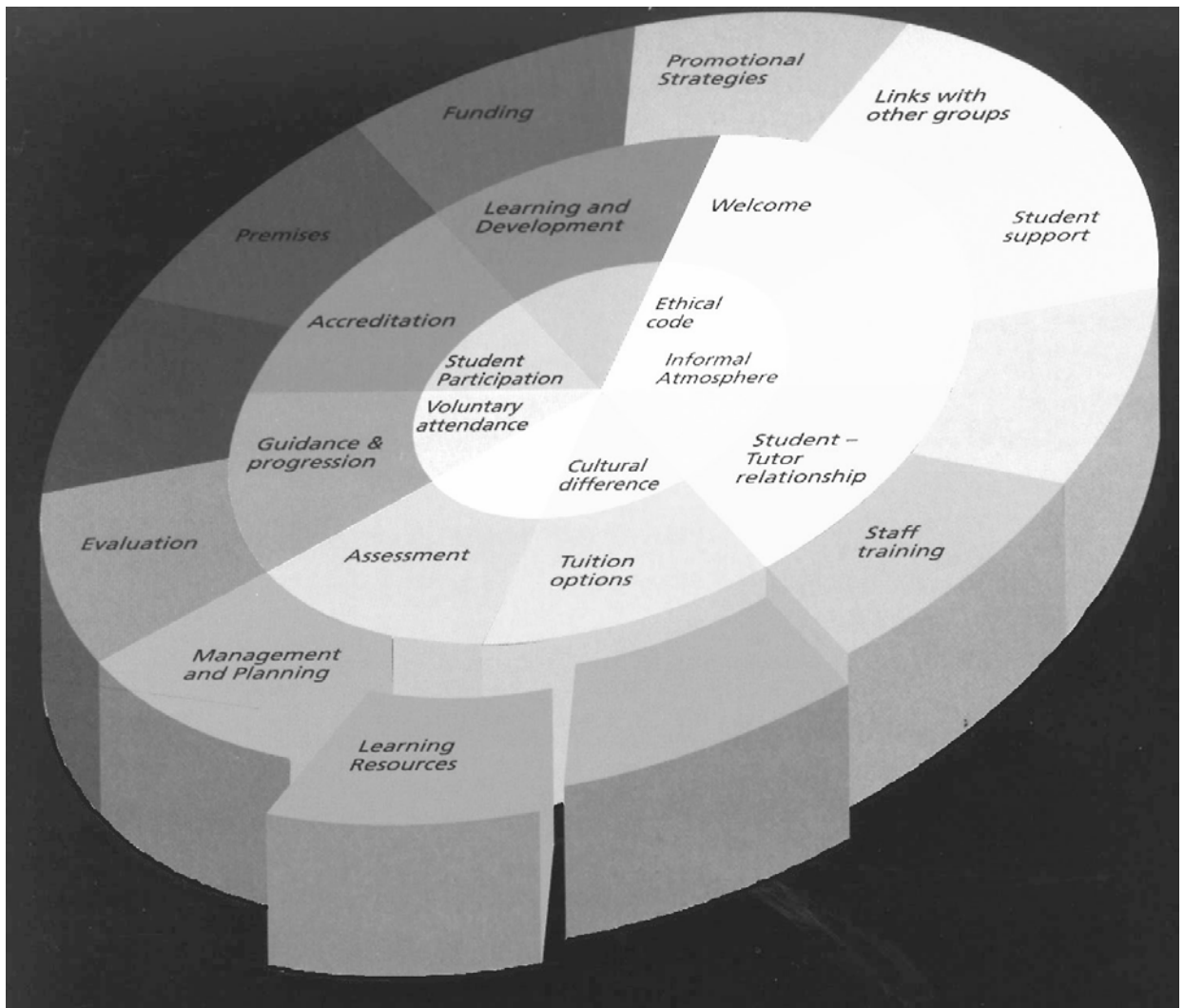
The comments of each of these groups reflected their own particular concerns. Managers have a business to run and must be concerned about overall costs of provision. They need to be effective, and want to work with and support tutors. Tutors want to teach their students as best they can and don't want to be constrained by lack of resources and insensitive time-tabling. Learners want to have good relationships with their tutors and be sure that they can get the necessary extra support, which may be crucial in ensuring their participation. Each group has its own special needs, which cannot always be met. Competing demands or divided loyalties may sometimes mean that one person's problem is solved at the expense of another.

5.2.8 The evolving quality framework

The first phase of the project led to the development of a framework of quality assurance, based on consultations with stakeholders, as with the provision of the previous sentences above.⁵ It consists of five guiding principles, six quality statements relating to the student experience and ten quality statements which deal with programmes, and represent the views of a wide range of people (*annex 2*). The complete framework is listed in *annex 3*. It provides an outline that can be adapted to suit local needs, and which can be added to in the future.

The framework is summarised diagrammatically below in *Figure 1*. It shows the interlocking and interdependent aspects of quality, which were identified in the process. At the heart of the framework are the five *guiding principles* - the inner circle. In the middle circle are the quality statements, which outline the kind of experience an ABE learner should be able to expect. The outer circle represents organisational aspects necessary to assure quality. Some segments have been left blank to indicate the need for, and the framework's ability to accommodate further development. This is why the proposed framework is described as *evolving*.⁶

Figure 1: Evolving Quality Framework for Adult Basic Education



The aspects of quality which were identified can be categorised as follows:

5.2.9 Guiding principles

5.2.10 Student experience

5.2.11 Programme management

5.2.9 Guiding principles

Five *guiding principles* were derived from the results of the consultations. These principles, it was felt should inform all ABE provision irrespective of context. The principles are as follows:

- i) The student's right to attend on a voluntary basis and to set his/her own goals will be supported by the organisation.
- ii) An ethical code of confidentiality, respect and trust will inform all aspects of the organisation.
- iii) Cultural differences will be respected at all levels of the organisation.
- iv) Particular attention will be paid to creating and maintaining an atmosphere of social interaction, informality and enjoyment within the organisation.
- v) Students will be enabled to participate in all aspects of the organisation including evaluation of the scheme/centre.

Together with the five *Guiding Principles* above, the *Evolving Quality Framework* can be understood in the more general context of education as a fundamental human right. Education at its best enriches all aspects of an individual's development - personal, social, creative, vocational, economic, cultural and political - and enables each and every individual to live his/her life in freedom and with dignity. Good ABE practice respects the adult status of the student and takes into account his/her prior knowledge, skills and individual life history.

5.2.10 Student experience elements

Six quality statements encapsulate the findings of the researchers with regard to the student experience. They are summarised as follows:

i) Welcome/Initial contact

A quality programme will provide opportunity to negotiate a starting point for student learning based on individual needs, interests, expectations, and goals, or refer the student to an appropriate programme if the centre is not in a position to meet the identified needs. Equally, it is important to share information with the student about how the centre works. All of this should take place within an informal atmosphere, which respects cultural background, the adult status of the individual and the voluntary nature of participation.

ii) Student-Tutor relationship

The importance of an effective student-tutor relationship was seen to be at the heart of all good learning experiences. To be effective, it was felt that the relationship must acknowledge the adult status of the student. In this way a quality programme will ensure that student goals, needs and interests remain at the heart of the learning process, both learner and tutor contributing to, and learning from, the total process in a collaborative atmosphere of mutual respect and trust.

iii) *Range of tuition options*

The need for different types and forms of provision for different interest groups was widely recognised. A quality programme must therefore provide maximum choice for students in terms of the nature, location and time-tabling of learning opportunities, including the opportunity to start learning at any point throughout the year. Students should be enabled to move between the different forms of provision according to their needs, taking advantage of one-to-one tuition, one-to-one support within a group and group tuition as appropriate.

iv) *Student assessment*

The need to assess learners' needs and level of literacy at point of entry and as they progress through their learning was acknowledged. The approach to initial assessment should enable learners to communicate existing skills and natural talents as well as learning needs, within an atmosphere in which cultural differences are understood and respected. In this way learners contribute to the development of their own learning programme and its assessment and so can become active participants in the evaluation of their own learning. Learners with specific learning/disability should be referred for professional assessment and given feedback in a sensitive manner, which respects their adult status.

v) *Guidance and progression*

It was felt that provision of adult-appropriate information and guidance about a variety of learning opportunities, together with support to participate in the definition and development of learning pathways, is essential to enable learners to make informed choices about internal and external progression routes.

vi) *Student accreditation*

Accreditation should be available at a variety of levels, should be optional, enable learners and have a currency beyond the organisational provision.

5.2.11 Programme management

Many issues raised relate to the management of programmes, including support of tutors. The following were mentioned as key issues, which should be taken into account in measuring the success of ABE programmes.

i) *Learning and development*

A quality programme will recognise and validate a variety of both quantitative and qualitative learning outcomes and will promote the importance of involving students in documenting unanticipated outcomes. The development of a student 'voice' will be encouraged through the publication of student writings and establishing student committees. Organisers/managers need to develop recording systems capable of documenting developmental outcomes such as growth in confidence, self-esteem and citizenship.

ii) *Sensitive and creative promotional strategies*

The need to engage in proactive outreach strategies in order to raise awareness among the general public and attract potential learners was seen as very important in widening access to adult basic education. Sensitive approaches, which use appropriate language and imagery in promoting a positive self-concept and the culture of students, were seen as essential to success.

iii) *Links with other groups*

The need to develop links with local, regional and national organisations was considered essential in ensuring the diverse needs of students are adequately met. Partnerships with other providers, voluntary and statutory, are crucial in developing sensitive and effective referral procedures and in guiding learners to

choose the most appropriate progression routes. Adult basic education providers need to know and understand the capacity of other local and regional groups so that these can be fully utilised to meet the diverse social and cultural needs of students.

iv) *Additional student support*

The need to provide additional support and information on issues such as fees, childcare, transport costs or specialist assessment and tuition, was considered paramount in widening access to programmes. Prospective students encountering a range of situational barriers or with special learning needs must also be provided with appropriate information about how to access services. It is essential that students with special learning needs receive all necessary support either within the centre, through referral to another agency or by a combination of both.

v) *Staff training and development*

Organisations should have a training policy for their entire staff, whether paid or voluntary. All stakeholders stressed the importance of quality training, both initial and in-service, for tutors, organisers and managers in the principles and practice of ABE, including optional access to accreditation. In-service training should take place on a regular basis and be free of charge. It is important that staff have team meetings on for review and evaluation and to share aspects of their practice, reflect on and discuss them.

vi) *Resources for teaching and learning*

Access to a range of learning materials is essential, including books and other print materials, which reflect cultural diversity and meet the diverse needs, interests and aptitudes of both students and tutors. It is equally important that tutors have access to materials that have the potential to stimulate creative and imaginative development in learners. Audio, video, computer and photocopying equipment should be provided as well as sufficient training to enable tutors and students to use literacy software and Information and Communication Technology (ICT). It was felt all teaching and learning resources should be regularly reviewed and evaluated by staff and learners.

vii) *Management and planning*

It was felt that managers should adopt a management style, in keeping with the guiding principles of the proposed quality framework. The management style adopted should ensure that all staff members work as a team, each team member having a clear understanding of his/her role and the role of others including students. The importance of keeping all informed by facilitating the flow of information both vertically and horizontally throughout the organisation was emphasised. Adequate time should be devoted to programme planning which should also be informed by the guiding principles of the proposed quality framework. An appropriate style of management will ensure that the voices of all team members are heard and respected within the planning process.

viii) *Programme evaluation*

A quality programme it was felt will ensure that all aspects of the scheme are evaluated on a regular basis and that there are procedures in place for recording, reviewing and disseminating the results of evaluation. It is important that students, tutors and managers are all active in the evaluation process and that the results of evaluation inform and guide future plans. A quality programme will also develop procedures for appraisal of performance. Appraisal and evaluation procedures will take into account all five guiding principles.

5.2.12 Findings from Phase 1

Phase 1 has demonstrated that it is possible to construct a quality model, which is based on the concerns of stakeholders and that bringing everyone together can have benefit in the search for quality.

The research revealed that at present there was no effective system for ensuring quality in ABE. The concerns of stakeholders, their experiences coming together to develop an agreed framework and their feelings about how to improve things have been recorded through interviews with groups of people who were involved in *Phase 1*.⁷ There was a lot of evidence to suggest that stakeholders wanted to provide a quality service and learners and tutors regularly evaluate their work. Many felt that not enough time and resources were made available for systematic evaluation and for improving quality approaches. While some providers had procedures in place, some reported adverse experiences that resulted from requirements that did not reflect the everyday experience. Managers require quantitative data for those who are funding provision. They were often more concerned with gathering data to complete reports for funding bodies, and an evaluation of the total quality experience was not their prime concern.⁸ Some tutors expressed the view that they were victims of a system which is obsessed by management requirements and which did not capture the full richness of the learning experience. Rather it was obsessed with details such as numbers participating, unit costs per capita etc;

There is, nevertheless, no doubt about the commitment of those consulted to provide a quality service. Learners and tutors regularly evaluate the work they do, but often there is an unstructured, uncoordinated way of working that might simply be described as a piecemeal approach, which does not value and record good practice or share what is going on with others. This means that new ideas and ways of working often rest with particular tutors or managers, who may not share their feelings or concerns with others often because the mechanisms to do so do not exist. This means that opportunities to disseminate new practices are not been shared among local teams or with others who could learn from new practices.

Those who participated in the pilot phase indicated a number of benefits that had arisen from participation. In general, staff felt the consultation process had given them a sense of greater involvement and inclusiveness in the quality assurance process. Many felt that as a result of the consultations a network of those interested in the promotion of a quality assurance system for ABE had been developed and participation had been beneficial for their learning. It was hoped that this networking would be extended through piloting the framework. The findings emphasise the need for a quality framework which is user-friendly, dynamic and developmental, and which can take account of the variations of provision, whether in a community/voluntary setting or within the statutory sector. Many felt the time was right for the development of quality assurance procedures that are both transparent and owned by all the stakeholders.

The study also revealed some limitations. In particular, participants felt the framework was incomplete and that additional performance indicators and measures might later arise. These would be devised locally, affording each organisation opportunity to take account of the local context and conditions.

With so many differences in understanding and interpreting ABE and in defining how to measure success, it is hardly surprising that an attempt to define a common approach raises many concerns. The framework which has emerged represents issues based on current perceptions of practitioners working within a system which is restricted by limitations of funding and the particular philosophies or vision of ABE held within particular organisations, and stakeholders are inevitable restricted in their thinking by the kind of provision which they represent. The emerging framework has therefore tended to reflect improvements within the particular modes of thinking of the participants, who in the main represent the particular thinking of the organisations they represent. Perhaps a study which was based on the *ideal* as opposed to the *real life* situation, and which allowed individual to think creatively and respond to their own views about things might have produced entirely different results.

But what is significant is not simply the end product or framework, but the new thinking about how quality approaches might be worked out together between stakeholders. The study also clearly revealed a determination that quality should become more central to decision making in ABE. For without a coherent system of quality assurance, ABE provision will remain a kind of lottery, with learners not having any indication about the kind of provision and quality of provision that they can find.

5.3 Phase 2: Testing the quality framework

Phase 1 of the research raised awareness about quality and developed a framework based on the needs of stakeholders. In *phase 2* the preliminary results from an attempt to implement the model are examined and discussed. This phase determines the perceived relevance and usefulness of the evolving model for those who have implemented it and the kind of changes or adaptations they feel are necessary if the model is to be used in the future.⁹ The following objectives were set:

- To test the quality standards system and evaluation model in a cross section of ABE programmes throughout the North of Ireland.
- To gather information on the impact of the piloted quality standards evaluation model.

From the outset it was acknowledged that the framework should be flexible and able to be adapted to local situations. In this way, it could become a tool for implementing *total quality management*. The pilot would show whether the framework could be adapted to suit local needs and whether additions to the quality standards system and evaluation model would be necessary. Other benefits, which might arise, could be increased expertise of ABE providers in the development of quality standards, greater awareness and acceptance of a common quality standard system and the development of a long-term implementation strategy for providers.

5.3.1 The implementation process

In *Phase 1* a framework for measuring quality was drawn up, but there was no agreed method for implementing this framework. A common strategy for implementation was also necessary if comparisons were to be drawn between centres. In *Phase 2* a process for implementing the standards was therefore agreed with all the stakeholders.¹⁰ This would also provide a framework for examining and reflecting on practice in a meaningful way.

The implementation process required tasks or actions to be carried out in communities. This involved action research or a *reflection-action-reflection* cycle, which encouraged participants to learn from their experience in systematic and rigorous ways. It involved ongoing documentation of the evaluation process to gather evidence for reflection, analysis and planning. The pilot was designed to be an action research project, through which the quality statements contained in the *workbook* developed from *Phase 1* (see *annex 3*) could be implemented in order to test their appropriateness and viability.

A cross section of ABE providers was invited to participate in *Phase 2*. Some of those who participated in *Phase 1* wanted to continue to be involved in *Phase 2* and some new partners were included in this phase.¹¹ A full list of all those who participated in *Phase 2* is available in *annex 2*. As in *Phase 1* participants had to make a commitment to involvement without any subsidisation of costs. This meant they had to find time and any additional costs associated with participation such as travel from their own budgets. A full list of all those who participated in *Phase 2* are included in *annex 2*. It was decided that the project would be documented from the outset, noting the processes used by each provider, analysing difficulties and identifying the most effective approaches to support the evaluation team.

Planning for the new methods to improve provision was the final step. This required working through the whole process and ensuring that action planning has a solid base in the reality of the scheme's practice. The process used for implementation of the framework is described below in *Figure 2*.

**Figure 2: Quality Framework for Adult Basic Education:
A Process for Implementation**

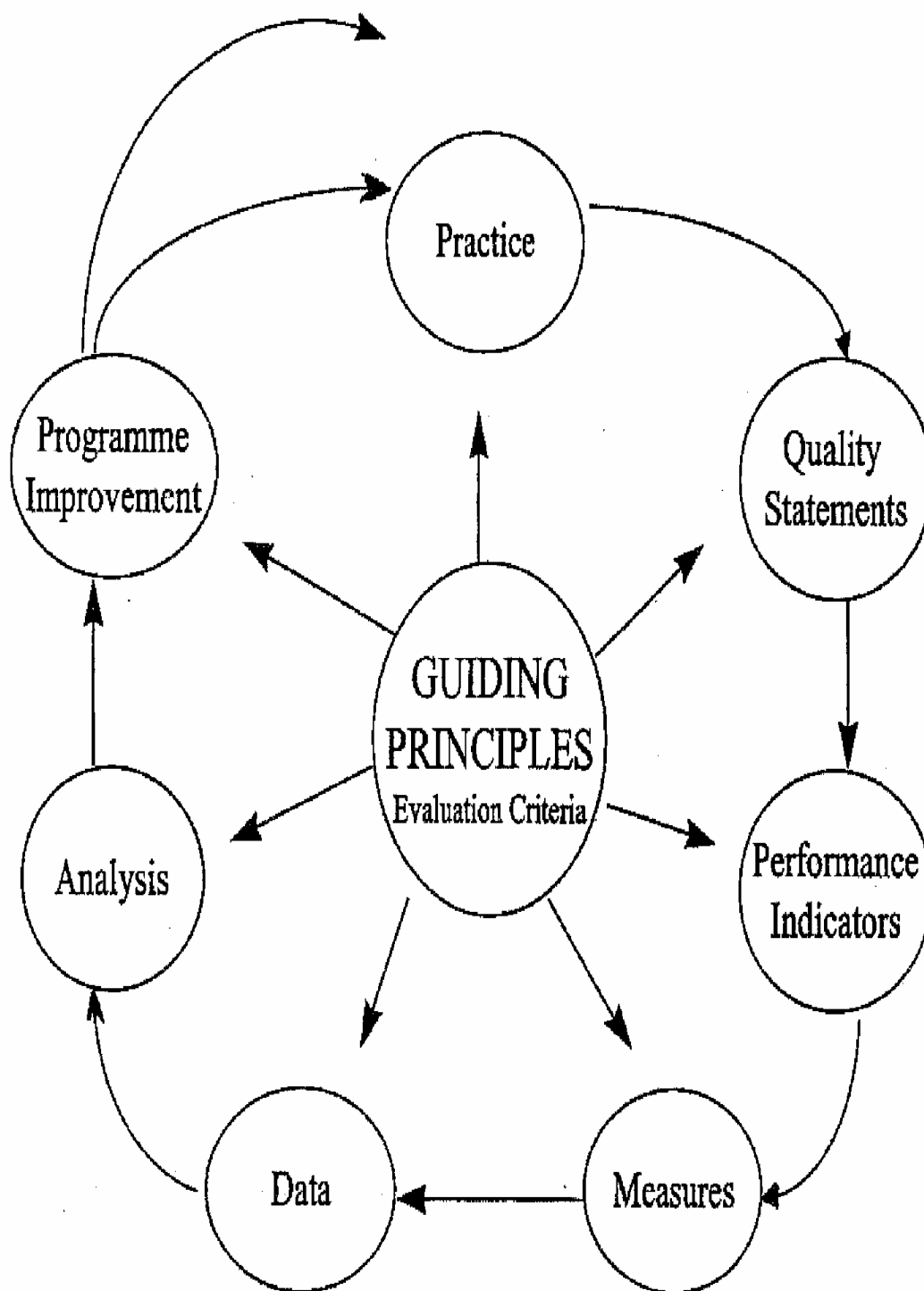


Figure 2 summarises the agreed process for implementing and developing the quality framework. At the centre of the process are the *guiding principles*, which inform the whole process. *Performance indicators*, to measure success are drawn up locally by the local teams, known as *evaluation teams*. Appropriate measures are then established to monitor these indicators. Application of the *performance indicators* and *measures* produce data, which can be analysed, refined and fed back into programme improvement. This should then lead to an action plan, which might simply be to continue doing something that works well or to plan for specific improvements. Such changes are integrated into practice and as such become the focus of further investigation through re-application of the implementation cycle over a period of time.

The quality statements on their own are not sufficient and are supplemented by *evaluation criteria*. ABE providers need some guidelines as to how they might use the quality statements and guiding principles for evaluating their own provision. The *evaluation criteria* are the guidelines or questions that each centre needs to ask in order to find out if it is delivering a quality service. The evaluation criteria are listed after each principle and quality statements (*annex 3*). They take the statements out of the ideal realm interpreting them in an operational framework.¹² The whole process outlined above in *Figure 2* is explained in greater detail below:

i) Guiding principles

The guiding principles and their evaluation criteria are seen as being at the heart of the process and should therefore influence all aspects of practice. Each guiding principle is making a general value statement. In order to realise the full implications of these statements, the teams reflect on them, search out their meaning with other members in their workplace, and develop any additional questions about each principle. The aim of this reflective exercise is to ensure that all those who are working on the implementation of the quality framework have a through understanding of the underlying principles of adult basic education which permeate all decisions.

ii) Quality statements

The quality statements are the standards that a provider may want to achieve. Each statement describes a key element of a quality programme. The content and concepts contained in these statements emerged from data collected from the providers involved in *Phase 1* of the research project. On their own the quality statements may not be sufficient to guarantee overall programme quality, but when all of the quality statements are put together they give a sense of how an ideal programme might be described.

iii) Performance indicators

To test the quality statements, performance criteria or indicators of success are developed. An *indicator* is a sign or a concrete and observable way of seeing performance-progress towards a goal. It is a sign of something- for example customers who come back again are usually an indicator of success and students achieving their learning goals are usually an indicator of a quality literacy scheme. Performance indicators are a tool which allow the local evaluation team to look at their performance for each quality statement. They enable evaluation teams to set out the standards by which they feel it appropriate to judge their service.¹³ The process calls upon creativity and ingenuity in suggesting innovative ways of demonstrating quality. The local evaluation teams indicated that as well as getting data from enrolment and accreditation records, other sources such as a comments book or scrapbook could be used.

iv) Measures

A measure provides a way to demonstrate or count whether the goal indicated in a performance indicator is being achieved. There may be more than one measure for any indicator. Measures could be qualitative and quantitative. They do not necessarily have to be something that can be counted. Not everything can be measured viz. the culture and ethos of a scheme or the social interaction within it. Some things can be demonstrated but cannot be measured. Measures must examine something that is important for example changes in how learners see themselves.

v) Data collection

Once the performance indicators and the measures have been agreed, it is possible to collect data that can be used to monitor progress. Gathering data provides information about programme practices. Data collection consists of specific application of the measure and recording the findings. New data are created as a result of consultations that is not necessarily based on any pre-conceptions.

Once again a team approach is important as tasks can be allocated to individual members or subgroups. The choice of techniques for the collection of data should correspond to the measure being addressed for example in order to measure public awareness of the literacy provision on offer, a survey in a busy shopping mall might be an appropriate approach.

Techniques for gathering data might include asking people pre-determined questions through group discussions, interviews, surveys etc; Such information can be collected by telephone, post, or in person. It might involve people in visualisation –drawing maps, symbolising problems and solutions. Observing situations - for example watching people coming to provision, during class or tutoring, or over coffee break might also provide evidence of improvements. A further possibility might be examining study records collected by providers for example attendance records, negotiated learning plans, diaries etc. Evidence might also simply arise from asking people about their everyday life experiences and examining how this contributes to improvement from an ABE perspective.

Whatever measures are selected, they must give rise to manageable methods of producing data, which can be analysed, recorded and reported. Data collection has to be considered within a sensible time frame, it must measure what is significant, and the necessary resources must be available to support collection, analysis, recording and reporting.

vi) Data analysis

Analysing data requires the analyst to apply the agreed measures to the data. Analysis allows the use of data to answer questions. It means looking for patterns (like a jig saw puzzle we look for pieces that fit and those that don't) to build up a picture and to be sure that the conclusions are justified by the data. A variety of indicators are usually needed, and they must be constantly reviewed. It means pulling together similar data, for example clusters of answers, which indicate common qualities. Examining those that match enables the researcher to look for patterns and relationships in the data in order to build up a picture and to be sure that conclusions are justified by the data for example is the group of dissatisfied students alike in some way? Do they have similar interests and needs? The next step is to examine the clusters and patterns to try to answer some questions about the data. Did some people respond in a particular way? Is this response caused by a particular set of circumstances? For example, a response to a question on the suitability of times of meeting might be traced to women with young families. This may indicate that their needs have not been taken into account. A profile of the students attending a certain centre compared to a profile of the local population may, for example, indicate that refugees or travellers or agricultural workers are not being included in a certain area. The identification of patterns of response enables the researcher to interpret, look for patterns and relationships, and interpret data. Data can be triangulated to ensure findings are more reliable, for example, when assessing student experience reliable information may be found by collating the results of a survey of learners, by observing group or individual tuition, or by studying attendance records.

vii) Programme improvement

Planning improvement completes the process. Once analysed, data can be recorded, perhaps in different formats to meet the needs of different stakeholders. When relevant personnel have reviewed the data they will hopefully want to make changes. It is then that the action planning stage can begin. This could include reviewing the process used and deciding whether it needs to be refined for the future. Action planning for programme improvement can be considered in three stages: deciding what can realistically be done, who needs to take action, agreeing the time frame for action.

5.3.2 Planning to implementation

A period of five months was a relatively short period for the pilot consultation. To enable the local teams to be effective a training programme was organised. A *facilitator* provided training and support for the *local evaluation team* implementing the framework.¹⁴

The work plan involved an initial meeting of local project teams to brief personnel about the process for implementing the framework. This initial meeting was followed up with further meetings in local centres and ongoing support with any difficulties encountered. A final one-day evaluation meeting was organised at the end of the pilot period. Representatives of all those who had worked on the project were invited to attend this meeting. These included ABE managers and organisers, tutors and learners. The aim of this workshop was to provide an opportunity for everyone to meet together, to reflect on the process and to contribute their views on the way forward. This was the first time that evaluation teams from different geographical areas meet together during *Phase 2*. The workshop provided a useful forum to examine how the process had worked, its advantages and drawbacks, and to exchange experience.

5.3.3 The training programme

In order for the standards to be piloted, it was important that staff involved in the local evaluation teams to have a good understanding of the quality system developed and the model for implementation. A systematic training and support programme organised in the form of workshops was organised to pass the necessary skills and knowledge on which the providers would need for effective implementation.

A series of one-day workshops were set up in three locations in Northern Ireland for the evaluation teams.¹⁵ The purpose of these workshops was to discuss the quality framework that emerged in *Phase 1* of the project, and to agree a programme for testing the quality standards. Sometimes centres sent different staff to follow up workshops and this sometimes caused difficulties, particularly as the staff had not always a comprehensive understanding of the process. In the workshops, the evaluation teams familiarised themselves with the evolving quality framework and undertook to implement statements of their choice. It was recognised that with so many constraints on the evaluation teams (as discussed earlier: time, funding etc;), it would not be possible for teams to implement the whole framework in a relatively short period of time. It was therefore suggested that each team choose a few statements to work on which they felt most comfortable with and which would have a particular relevance to their provision.¹⁶

The evaluation teams followed a step-by-step process in order to put the evolving quality framework into practice. These steps involved:

- Reviewing the quality framework and identifying at least one quality statement as a starting point.
- Agreeing which quality indicators to select and discussing what could be presented as evidence of quality.
- Deciding how each quality indicator could be measured in order to demonstrate the extent to which the indicator was being achieved.
- Collecting data through a variety of means including surveys, gathering materials, and reviewing guidelines and procedures.
- Analysing the data by looking at patterns indicative of poor or good practice
- Reporting what was found to the rest of the scheme and others.
- Using the analysis to confirm good practice and to develop action plans to improve wherever the need for improvement was indicated.

Most teams agreed to analyse two quality statements most relevant to them. In some cases this was because the statement represented an area of work that had already been under discussion in team meetings while for others it was an area where they felt an in-depth examination was overdue. In other cases, it was an area they felt they were doing well, while in others it was an area where the team felt they could enhance their provision. In the long term, the actual starting point in the quality framework is perhaps irrelevant, as the whole scheme should be reviewed over time. However, the choice of an area of work where the team felt they could readily find evidence enabled rapid progress to be made with consequent motivation. Similarly, choosing to review an area that was going well could have the benefit of helping the scheme feel good about its strengths.

With the support of a facilitator, teams identified indicators to demonstrate quality. Performance indicators and measures were developed for each quality statement that the provider had chosen to work on. Between meetings individual team members took responsibility for collecting and analysing the data for each of the performance indicators using agreed measures. The information was then presented and discussed at the next team meeting and an action plan developed to address identified gaps in the scheme's provision.

The process as described earlier in *figure 2*, was the method for implementation for which training was given. It was recommended that due to time constraints, the centres should consider what factors they would use to make choices on statements to work on. It was suggested that they might consider ease of obtaining available evidence, interest and relevance to their provision as factors. Some examples of work carried out on quality statements are discussed later and the statements are included in *annex 4*. The examples chosen have been selected to demonstrate a contrast in the way local teams approached the task and the degree of success they achieved. Not all the statements included in the framework were developed and not all teams were successful in developing the statements. Some centres experienced difficulties in finding time to work with local teams and others found it difficult to understand the process. Some were unable to complete the work in the short time allocated. Others did not participate in the project after the training and some remained silent and did not give any reason for withdrawal. At the end of the process all the teams met together to review the process and the view expressed are summarised later.

Sometimes the team's work simply confirmed what they had expected. Sometimes they were surprised at what they actually found. For everyone it was a learning process. At the end of the process the facilitators met to discuss academic and operational issues and to study the lessons learned from the evaluation teams and how this information might contribute to a plan for future development. Such meetings were useful for mutual support, discussing implementation strategies and exchanging experience of how the process was developing with evaluation teams.

The work of the evaluation teams demonstrated that there was keen interest, motivation and enthusiasm for improving practice. For many, this had been the first time to step back from their day-to-day practice and to reflect critically as a team on how their service operates. The teams found that the most enjoyable stages of the implementation cycle were the collection and analysis of evidence. The use of the concrete as opposed to the abstract (i.e. *performance indicators* and *measures*), offered an opportunity for more genuine involvement and brought much satisfaction.

On the other hand, some individuals and teams initially found following the implementation cycle a daunting experience. They had no affinity with the language and found the concepts difficult to grasp. Some translated the concepts into a more familiar language. Some found the process too cumbersome and lengthy for example participants tended to want to move to programme improvement straight after developing measures and sometimes even after the development of performance indicators. There were examples of teams using the *SWOT analysis technique* (ie. assessing the *strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats*), as a method of reflection and analysis. One tutor wanted to redesign the cycle to make it more '*student-centred*'. Those who worked together found that a joint effort was a satisfying experience. Many said that working on the research project provided motivation, and those who met other project representatives, felt enthused by the knowledge that others were interested in their practice and sharing similar problems and challenges. Evaluation teams working together on a regular basis found the use of the implementation cycle gradually and easily integrated into practice. It gave purpose and direction

to a planned review and opportunity to revise practices. It enabled the discussion of quality without anyone feeling threatened and collaboration based on the model became a satisfying experience.

Learning became evident even within the short time of the project. Evaluation teams began to notice that proof of performance collected for one quality statement had the potential to contribute evidence for another for example minutes of tutor meetings often provided evidence for more than one statement. Evaluation teams, which were able to meet regularly, and used the cycle routinely, found it a useful systematic method of working with the obvious benefit that each team member understood the other's approach.

5.3.4 Implementing the framework in Phase 2

The findings from *Phase 2* are summarised in three sections. The first section examines the new learning that arose from testing the quality statements developed by the stakeholders in *Phase 1*. A number of questions are examined. What was learnt from discussion about the *guiding principles*? Did the stakeholders see them as useful and relevant and applicable for every centre? Are the *guiding principles* acceptable in their current form or do they require modification? Were the teams able to understand and make use of the statements to evaluate their process and methods of working? What new knowledge did it reveal for them? The following discussion attempts to answer these questions.

The second section looks at stakeholders' perspectives on *Phase 2*. These include findings about how they reacted to the project, what they learnt, what changes have been brought about as a result of involvement and how they view the future. How successful did the evaluation teams find the pilot implementation? What did the teams learn from the implementation process? Did any new learning occur for other stakeholders involved in implementation? What modifications has the study revealed as necessary to the framework or implementation process?

Finally the third section looks at wider issues that arise from the study. It examines the new learning which has emerged from the investigations, and any apparent contradictions in the study. It asks whether the model could be a useful tool for implementing quality in ABE in the future.

5.3.5 Testing the framework

The *guiding principles* and the *quality statements* developed in *Phase 1* of the project were discussed during the training programme with the evaluation teams or their representatives. Because the guiding principles are seen as so central to the whole process of quality enhancement and measurement in ABE, it was decided that these would be used as exemplars during the training programme. Everyone examined each of the guiding principles and the results of these discussions are reported below.

Together the teams examined a wide range of statements. A sample of six of these statements is examined here. These represent four of the quality statements. Two evaluation teams examined two of the same statements. The findings were chosen because of their clarity in presentation and their accuracy in following the suggested model for implementation. The full results written as statements are included in *annex 4* and are discussed below. The evaluation teams were not asked to report their findings according to a specific format and consequently their findings are presented in very different ways. The process engendered much discussion and debate, produced significant findings about the guiding principles and quality statements and provides useful insights into how the framework might be implemented in the future.

5.3.6 The guiding principles

The *guiding principles* induced a great deal of discussion during the training programme and after in the pilot centres. These discussions were promoted by questions contained in the quality framework workbook which was given to everyone involved in the project, the contents of which are included in *annex 3*.

This workbook was developed to assist the implementation process. Issues raised are summarised below.

Guiding Principle 1 - The student's right to attend on a voluntary basis and to set his/her own goals will be supported by the organisation.

Questions raised for the evaluation teams:

What does the principle mean in practical terms for your scheme?

What might threaten the principle of voluntary attendance?

How might students feel pressurised when it comes to setting goals?

Providers offering small group tuition supported this principle strongly. This kind of provision was usually organised in the voluntary or community sector, especially through development projects and focused on the needs of special groups-for example women returning to education, the handicapped, travellers etc; This type of provision is currently seen as representing only a small part of the ABE sector. As the requirement to engage in accreditation grows, it was felt the right to voluntary attendance and setting ones own goals might diminish. It was also felt that the right to choose to attend could challenge the viability of provision. If not enough people were attending provision might be forced to close.

The right to voluntary attendance and to set one's own goals was seen by contrast, as inappropriate for provision where attendance was mandatory. Government training programmes often required compulsory attendance, as a condition of joining the programme. Attendance hours and courses, which must be followed, are often clearly defined and disciplinary procedures and sanctions for non-attendance and bad time keeping are in place. Non-attendance can result in reduction or withdrawal of state benefits or termination of the training programme. The goals set by the government agency (the Training & Employment Agency) may be different from those of the learner.

In the colleges, it was also thought that emphasis on the right to voluntary attendance could threaten the viability of the class and ultimately the tutor's job. Tutors are employed to teach classes with minimum numbers, and funding is linked to retention of students. In colleges, funding formulas are also linked to availability of accreditation and to the numbers obtaining accreditation. In such circumstances a flexible agreement about attendance was seen as inappropriate and militating against policies for retention of students and accreditation of learning outcomes.

The principle of voluntary attendance could be said to militate against government objectives - funding policies which require value for money, viability of class numbers requiring regular attendance etc; The rights of other group members could as a result be affected by the irregular attendance patterns of other group members. The right of the individual to set his/her own goals, was also seen as problematic. A range of issues might thus militate against the learner setting his/her own objectives. For example, sometime goals were determined by the learning programme or accreditation procedures that might conflict with the particular needs of the learner. Where this was the case, learners might be redirected to a different kind of provision that might be able to meet the needs of the individual. (For example training, community, open learning etc;)

So while this principle might be recognised as worthwhile, it might be sometimes problematic in practice.

Guiding Principle 2 - An ethical code of confidentiality, respect and trust will inform all aspects of the organisation.

Questions raised for the evaluation teams:

What does this principle mean in practical terms for your scheme/centre?

How might confidentiality be defined?

Should all members of the organisation-students, tutors, organisers/managers – be trained to behave according to an agreed code of practice?

Discussion about this principle centred around what is meant by confidentiality, which it was thought needed to be defined by the group of learners. It was felt learners must accept responsibility for what they share. These rules should also apply to tutors sharing information about learners.

It was recognised that this had implications for particular situations such as government-funded training and might require guidelines to be drawn up between the government agency and employer. Learners would also have an obligation to preserve confidentiality of information in work placements. The evaluation teams recognised that this issue needed to be discussed and constantly reviewed. Agreements might be different in different situations and a common code of practice could inform all provision. This would be better drawn up at national level. It was also recognised that a policy on record-keeping and data protection should be drawn up and should be transparent.

While the principle was seen as a good one, much exploratory work needs to be done and decisions reached about how it might apply in practice.

Guiding Principle 3 - Cultural difference will be respected at all levels within the organisation.

Questions raised for the evaluation teams:

What does this principle mean in practical terms for your scheme/ centre?

How might you ensure that those from different social and cultural backgrounds feel fully included in the life and activities of the scheme/centre?

While many agreed that acknowledgement of cultural difference was important in achieving wider participation and improving success, most said that this was not central to planning. This principle should be part of a drive to promote equal opportunities and should therefore be acknowledged within institutional frameworks. Respect for cultural difference was seen first and foremost as a management issue and managers should take legal requirements into account in planning and providing for ABE. This would include legislation on sex, religious and disability discrimination etc. Once an institutional policy was in place, this would facilitate changes in the working environment for example, the promotion of a multi-cultural curriculum in ABE, or the removal of sex bias in the curriculum etc. The need to provide an environment in which everyone could feel comfortable was generally acknowledged. Some preferred the term *cultural diversity*, which was seen as a broader and more comprehensive term. Cultural difference was seen to refer to a wide range of issues from age, gender, religious background, disability and employment status to issues affecting certain groups such as travellers, ethnic groups and cultural awareness. It was acknowledged that schools had developed local education programmes for mutual understanding, and it was felt that ABE had not taken up the challenge. The ABE curriculum should be used to promote values of tolerance, mutual understanding and social cohesion. Some felt that many of these issues were also true for all aspects of the curriculum and an institutional response would be necessary to promote change.

Much needs to be done to embrace this principle with direction coming from the top.

Guiding Principle 4 - Particular attention will be paid to creating and maintaining an atmosphere of social interaction, informality, and enjoyment within the organisation.

Questions raised for the evaluation teams:

What does this principle mean in practical terms for your scheme?

What might threaten the interactive, informal atmosphere within a scheme/centre?

The importance of enjoyment in learning was widely recognised as important if adults are to be encouraged to engage in learning and be successful. This principle is often emphasised in discussions about promoting lifelong learning. Enjoyment is important if adults are to be encouraged to participate and go on learning.

The need to preserve a balance between a curriculum that might promote accreditation, and yet preserve an informal atmosphere was acknowledged. Appropriate learning requires a learning environment that promotes social interaction, and one which enables adults to mix freely (for example over a cup of coffee) would be important in bringing about the ethos advocated. Too many administrative personnel might also threaten an interactive and informal atmosphere which ABE requires. Drives for accountability and attempts to make the service more professional might also threaten the interactive, informal atmosphere. Many of those who work in the ABE service have themselves few educational qualifications and tend to work in a rather ad hoc way. Many fear that moves towards accreditation will be accompanied by a more bureaucratic approach and will lead to more formal and bureaucratic procedures, which may militate against informality which so many feel has been the cornerstone of past success.

The principle was seen as crucial and much work needs to be done, if it is to permeate provision.

Guiding Principle 5 - Students will be enabled to participate in all aspects of the organisation, including evaluation of the scheme/centre.

Questions raised for the evaluation teams:

What does this principle mean in practical terms for your scheme/centre?

How might you ensure that students, together with tutors and organisers/managers, share in a sense of ownership of the scheme/centre?

Opportunity for involvement of student in all aspects of provision varied greatly between providers. In practice the amount of involvement of students varied considerably from provider to provider. Some providers had little involvement of learners in decision-making and some, particularly in rural areas, reported great difficulty in getting students involved. Others, particularly in the training sector, admitted that it had not been customary to consult with learners, though quality control procedures were increasingly encouraging this type of interaction to happen. Some reported regular consultation with learners and the inclusion of some students in staff training and in marketing events. Providers felt that learner representatives should attend and contribute to team meetings, and mechanisms to ensure that student views are taken into account should be a requirement.

This principle was again seen as important and worthy of development. Where learner participation has not been common, it may take some time to develop effectively. In *chapter 3*, the very many barriers which adults experienced in returning to education were highlighted. Many of these barriers are only partly overcome when an adult joins provision. Most adults do not feel equals with their tutors and tend to feel the tutors know best. It will require a reorientation in thinking and attitudes for most adults not only to enable them to learn, but to enable them to contribute to the shaping the kind of learning they need and want and ultimately the contribution they can make to the evaluation process. Innovative strategies will need to be tried and tested and shared with other providers. It will be important to ensure that where learners are involved in discussions, that these are informal and seek to elicit a contribution from everyone. Learners must feel comfortable if they are to contribute.

From a theoretical or policy perspective, the guiding principles were endorsed as being important in providing an overriding ethos for ABE, but in practice it appears much lip service has in the past been paid to implementing the ethos which they seek to create. Since the stakeholders identified them as important it was surprising to find how many providers felt that more attention needed to be paid to these issues. Perhaps this indicates the conflict which may exist in the minds of the practitioners between the need to be concerned with everyday issues (the curriculum, management etc;) and the need to have underpinning philosophies or ethical codes, which guide development, the later sometimes being overlooked by managers and bureaucrats. The guiding principles therefore appear to be more an aspiration or ideal rather than a representation of the true picture for most provision. This would suggest that an emphasis on quality and evaluation has enabled many stakeholders to take a step back and express a view of how provision should be for the future as well as the present. While many of the guiding principles may need to be addressed more rigorously, the focusing on quality issues could be said to be a useful first step in encouraging stakeholders to think critically about how provision might be improved.

5.3.7 The quality statements

A summary of findings from six of the local evaluation teams on four of the quality statements are reported in *annex 4*. It was not possible to pilot all the quality statements over a six-month period and not all the work initially undertaken by evaluation teams was completed. Many who commenced work found the time scale too short. The statements included were the work of six evaluation teams from different areas of provision working on four different statements. The conclusions below represent an attempt to summarise the main findings from the process. They are initial findings and it would of course be necessary to pilot the statements over a much longer period of time before inferences about agreements or disagreements could be confirmed. For reasons of confidentiality, the identity of each centre is protected.

The evaluation team reports showed that teams had developed a clear understanding of the quality issue they wanted to explore. All the statements indicate that the centres were able to identify evaluation criteria and performance indicators. A variety of approaches were used to gather data that included interviews, questionnaires, examination of documents such as reports and record sheets available in the centres. However, when it came to action planning there was a mixed response. Some of the teams' reports had developed sophisticated actions for improvement (*example 1, 4, 5 6*) while others had a less developed sense of how to improve things (*example 2 and 3*). *Example 2* does not make any specific suggestions on how to improve things.

Sometimes suggestions were in the real and concrete (*examples 1,4 and 5*) and at other times they were simply expressions of aspirations for improvement (*example 4*). Most followed the recommended process for analysis (*Fig 2*), but some also used the *SWOT* management techniques as a method of analysing *strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats*. Each team reflected on the process and in every case there was evidence of learning from the process.

The responses indicated that the process had enabled providers to develop a sophisticated understanding of the statements and their applicability within their centres and there was much evidence of team reflection and an ability to develop actions to improve their situations. There was some evidence of creative and innovative suggestions for improving practice. (*example 4 &6*). However in some cases (*examples 2 & 3*) there was evidence of confusion about the task and the work requested was incomplete. It is unclear whether this was due to a lack of understanding or a lack of time. Nevertheless it reinforces the view that continuous monitoring and support will need to be made available to local teams, if they are to understand and carry out the task of evaluation effectively.

5.3.8 Stakeholders Perspectives' from Phase 2

The relevance and importance of the framework was further examined from the evaluation team reports and from further discussion with the stakeholders.¹⁷ Comments indicated that both advantages and drawbacks implementing the quality model were identified. Their views are discussed below and an assessment of the relevance and usefulness of the model is made.

The stakeholders involved in the pilot were generally interested in reflecting on the quality of provision and considering how quality might be affirmed or further improved. What was initially perceived as an inordinate time commitment became less a factor for the centres involved. When the local evaluation teams were set up, and the tasks discussed, they soon became familiar with the evaluation model and what was being asked of them. Confidence soon grew and progress was made. An incidental outcome of involvement in the project was the increased understanding by team members of each other's role and responsibilities within the organisation. Collaboration between various stakeholders also enhanced motivation and reduced isolation. It is hardly surprising that those centres, which did not or could not set up local evaluation teams, did not perceive the benefits of involving different stakeholders. The project teams indicated that the implementation process had been useful in providing a forum for reflection on quality issues and had led to a greater focus on practice in the field.

Managers, local organisers, tutors, and learners all made specific comments about the personal benefits gained from their participation. The managers had an increased appreciation of the special nature and time-consuming character of ABE, especially the initial contact and the preparation of individual learning plans. For example, they had a better understanding of the time needed for record keeping, including the use of ICT in storing information.

Some organisers reported that it had been easier to discuss certain issues affecting the quality of provision, as a result of the project, which had been previously difficult to raise. For example, discussions about the student-tutor relationship were often difficult to raise and might never have been otherwise examined. Organisers felt they could not have asked learners about the quality of their relationship with tutors and to what extent they had been encouraged to play an active role in directing and evaluating their own learning. Previously, organisers would have felt this was questioning the tutor's expertise, but by raising these questions through the quality framework evaluation, the organisers felt more at ease with each other.

The tutors, and in particular volunteer tutors, indicated that they had gained new insights into the need to gather quantitative data, and into the need to keep good records to enable managers to meet accountability requirements. For example, many indicated that they had never really understood the tasks, which an organiser had to complete, particularly in providing statistics for funding purposes. A feeling of greater involvement with work in the centre emerged, with tutors in some cases increasing their voluntary commitment. They enjoyed being part of a team and being consulted.

The learners felt that they had derived immense benefit from being given a voice through the project. The opportunity to meet with other team members was appreciated. One learner said he felt it was the first time he had ever been listened to. The views of one learner on the student elements are recorded in *annexe 4*. These comments indicate that learners can contribute to the reflective process of evaluation, and that various ways can be found to tap into the richness of their experience.

In summary, the comments of the various groups or stakeholders indicate that the quality framework provided new and innovative ways of discussing and analysing quality between them, in a way that is acceptable to everyone. It also indicated that discussions resulted in stakeholders having a much better understanding of each other's roles, which would facilitate better working relationships and ultimately better quality of provision in the future.

The opportunity for groups of stakeholders to work together was reported to be a useful experience. This was true for the training sessions where groups from different areas of practice worked together, and for the evaluation teams who worked within organisations. The end evaluation demonstrated that many had learned a lot about each other from working together and that useful contacts had been established between providers, which had hitherto not existed.

At local level there was reciprocal learning about the needs of others. Evaluation teams reported that requests for data from managers were more clearly understood. Teams now found monthly and yearly reports about participation as useful for providing evidence of performance and not simply for providing information for managers. Management appreciated the delicate and time-consuming nature of initial contacts with students, and the need to draw up individual learning programmes. Volunteer tutors obtained a broader view of the work of their organisation and offered to undertake additional helping roles such as handing out leaflets, developing publicity materials and reviewing resources. For one centre the impetus to address quality issues gave purpose and direction to a planned review of publicity material. A survey carried out in a busy shopping mall, which asked whether people knew about the ABE service, produced staggering results and led to the redesign of promotional material, targeted more precisely at specific groups. The learners also derived many incidental benefits from working on the evaluation teams. For example, learning how to contribute to discussion within a group and, as a result, improvement in interpersonal and communication skills. Contributing to a research project in which other teams were involved also provided motivation, and those team members who met other project representatives felt enthused by the knowledge that others were interested in their practice and shared similar problems and challenges. This produced a greater feeling of involvement in the work of the centre and reduced a feeling of isolation which some felt. It also demonstrated that the local provision was part of a much wider

provision. The findings showed that many felt that much could be gained from continuing with the process that had begun, but many also acknowledged that additional finance would need to be found to support quality improvements.

An important aspect of the work of the project was the raising of awareness and a debate about quality in ABE. The national discussions about quality gave an increased level of relevance and legitimacy. The current focus on quality issues at all levels - policy, management, teaching etc. meant that the organisations and individuals involved in the project were aware of the need to think about and develop systems of quality assurance. In this sense it could be said that the project came at an opportune time and received the necessary commitment to make it a success.

The project also raised new questions and debates about quality. Previously many had seen quality models as something that was handed down from senior managers. Many had not previously considered the potential contribution that they might make in developing a quality assurance system, which engaged so many stakeholders. Discussions, which involved the whole range of stakeholders could be said to have been very useful. The results have shown that a focus on quality, has the potential to encourage self-assessment in a more objective, less threatening manner by enabling organisations to determine the meaning of quality in their own context, and setting and applying their own indicators and measures of performance. The project provided an opportunity for a review and revision of practices to enhance quality without people feeling resentful. It offered a *total quality management approach* with the involvement of all of the stakeholders. Key features of this particular approach were its participatory and transparent nature. It encouraged the participation of a wide range of interested people in an open and frank way, which also encouraged genuine learning. Learning which occurred from the *process*, was found to be just as important as *outcomes* in terms of a legitimised quality framework for ABE. Involvement in the process led not only to action planning for improvement of existing programmes, but also to wider benefits such as creating a culture of learning, self-evaluation and review.

The study further showed that a team approach which included all the stakeholders working together- the manager, organiser, paid tutor, volunteer tutor and learner, could be successful in identifying and improving quality procedures for ABE. The manager provided an overview of the broader context in which ABE is taking place and their involvement added a sense of importance to the work for other team members.¹⁸

In addition awareness was highlighted among volunteer tutors and learners that they too had a role to play in contributing to identify good practice in ABE. The team approach showed that there was potential for others besides the local organiser or manager, to assume responsibility for aspects of the work traditionally seen as the organiser's or manager's role for example the promotion of the service. Imaginative and innovative ideas for recruitment came from learners and tutors, who brought new ways of thinking to the evaluation team. However, the organiser is a focal person in the process who holds the key to its success and the local organiser or manager holds much of the information required by the team. It became apparent that it would be difficult to involve others such as volunteer tutors and learners, as active team members, if the local organiser did not wish to ensure that this happens. This means that the evaluation process is also likely to raise questions about roles and responsibilities within local teams and how these are distributed or redefined. The redefining of the role of local organiser may therefore be crucial in ensuring that responsibility for quality is shared by the whole ABE community, including learners and volunteer tutors. Given that responsibilities are sometimes defined by contractual responsibilities of paid staff, it may be necessary to consider how others, who do not have such contractual responsibilities can take responsibly and be held accountable for decisions.

The stakeholders also mentioned some drawback they had experienced through involvement in the process. The language of quality assurance was unfamiliar to tutors and learners and was difficult to comprehend. It takes time to become familiar with and competent in the many terms used and many of the pilot groups experienced problems in understanding the language of the framework. While the training programme had helped with this, there were still issues of understanding and interpretation that needed to be addressed. In some cases the teams altered the existing terminology or invented their own terminology. The teams' understanding of the particular sector in which people worked sometimes influenced this. This did not

detract from the process. However, the ability to alter the process depends to some extent on a full understanding of the process and this requires an investment of time. Many teams felt a lot more time was needed, particularly in the early stages of implementation.

While it was possible to train key staff in using the framework, the preponderance of a large number of part-time staff and volunteer tutors added to the difficulties of promoting a wider understanding of the processes involved. The continuous use of the framework, it was felt, would require ongoing training and support for teams of workers in the centres and this would require extra resources. One way of dealing with this problem might be to develop an implementation cycle with a team for a quality statement. This would enable participants to experience the process and then disseminate or cascade it to new teams.

It was also felt that the quality process could best be established through an incremental process that would introduce quality incrementally over a period of time. It would not be possible to examine all aspects in a relatively short space of time, and working at a pace to suit the individual organisation would be important if staff were not to be overwhelmed. It was suggested that centres might best choose issues that were important to them take and use the process described to facilitate improvements. This might mean choosing to work on some issues first and working on others later. In time it would be possible to see the interconnectedness of statements, and recognise that earlier work might produce evidence, which can be used again and again in reviewing other aspect of the centre.

A detailed work plan covering all the stages of the process and which includes a time scale for completion is therefore essential. It is also important not to confer an '*elite status*' on an evaluation team as the group responsible for quality. It is important to recognise that others, from outside the evaluation team may be able to contribute to the process and to carry out tasks identified. The teams might therefore usefully pose questions to others, and ask for help, for example, in carrying out surveys, or in designing questionnaires. In larger organisations more than one evaluation team might be necessary.

The providers also felt that the involvement of an independent researcher had given the process a greater level of impartiality and some felt that the process could only be continued if a facilitator was available. Most felt that involvement required a lot of additional time, for example, to train staff in the tasks required. It was felt would it would be impossible to integrate this time into existing work programmes of paid part-time staff. A recurrent finding was that an emphasis on continuous improvement would require additional financial resources, which could not be found from existing budgets. While some of the tasks such as surveys might be able to be carried out as part of routine work, additional financial resources would be needed to ensure appropriate time is made available for evaluation teams to meet and embed quality assurance into their normal work. It was also felt that core staff might have to take a much greater role in providing training and managing quality.

Those involved in the pilot mentioned the importance collaborative activities between teams of providers working on the quality framework. This had enabled them to share ideal and sort out problems together. They also mentioned the importance of keeping records, for example, of discussions about how to proceed and on the quality process. The importance of consistency in involvement for successful teamwork, with as few as possible changes to teams between meetings, seems to be a decisive factor in determining successful outcomes. Understanding the process and the new and unfamiliar language of quality assurance used is also essential to success. As processes become more familiar this problem should diminish.

5.3.9 Wider issues

The project demonstrated that a focus on quality issues can produce positive elements of change in the management and practice of ABE and that these changes can have a knock on effect across provision, encouraging critical thinking about practice and acting as a catalyst for change. It was possible to engage stakeholders in a dialogue or debate about quality and to initiate improvements in a relatively short space of time. Even with the limitations imposed by a lack of specially earmarked funding, participants in the project reported positive benefits from participation. Attitudinal changes about quality assurance were also discernible as a result of focusing on quality.

Since the quality framework was developed through the involvement of stakeholders, a starting point for everyone, which acknowledged their particular concerns about quality, could be found. The project also clearly demonstrated that imaginative and innovative ways of measuring quality could develop from teamwork, which involves a range of interest groups. Many providers commented that this method of investigation had for the first time brought together groups of people with very different roles to exchange views and to share ideas about how quality of services might be improved. The framework allowed this to happen in a non-threatening atmosphere, where participants respected the views of each other.

The project demonstrated that it was possible for stakeholders to work together to bring about short and long-term improvement in the management and practice of quality in ABE. It enabled stakeholders to engage in discussions about the nature and purpose of quality and to bring quality assurance in ABE to the forefront in the educational debate.

The project was instrumental in developing an awareness of quality issues and introducing a debate about quality in ABE, which many recognised, had hitherto been missing. It had also been important in enabling volunteer tutors and learners, to better understand the contribution they could make to improve practice. The framework gave focus to quality issues that centres wanted to address. Once work on the statements had begun, it was possible to develop a genuine understanding of the many other issues involved in quality, and to make connections between particular issues of concern. At the local level there was reciprocal learning about the needs of other stakeholders. Managers, tutors and learners all understood each other's function better as a result of the dialogue that had taken place. This it was felt would lead to greater understanding between tutors and managers in the carrying out of their respective responsibilities.

Working with colleagues in other centres also added greater interest and motivation and the co-operative spirit that was engendered, led to improved understanding and co-operation within and between centres. Colleagues reported that they were more likely to contact other colleagues, to share ideas about quality, and to discuss common issues and problems. New knowledge about what was happening elsewhere also made it possible to ensure that learners, particularly those with specialist learning needs, went to provision that was best able to meet their specific needs. So stakeholders came to understand the different ingredients of quality, the need to listen to each other and to become aware of other perspectives. Quality was no longer seen as an absolute standard that could be easily measured. The need to understand processes that were complex and sometimes contradictory was recognised, and the evolving nature of quality was acknowledged.

Discussions about the framework and its implementation also revealed limitations. The study demonstrated that the framework was not complete. Some quality issues were missing from the framework particularly in the area of learning and teaching, communication, self-assessment and self-evaluation. The performance indicators, measures, etc; developed in the implementation stage would also need to be piloted among a wider range of providers before any general inferences could be drawn. It was recognised from the outset that the framework would be evolving and could not include every single measure. While this is in one sense a limitation, it is not necessarily a weakness. An important strength of the framework is that it is not a final set of standard.

Any framework that is seen as an inclusive set of standards or benchmarks, could inevitably lead to the development of a competitive hierarchy where some centres reach the pre-determined standards or benchmarks and others don't. This might lead to competition between centres and the emergence of a quality list, rating centres from best to worst. This could affect staff morale, and lead to the targeting of funding to centres who meet certain standards. Such an approach would tend to standardise provision and in so doing, might overlook certain local factors, which in turn might exclude more adults. For example, the needs of special groups such as slow learners, ethnic minorities or ex-offenders that have often-specific requirements might be forgotten. The inclusive approach adopted in the development of this framework, would seem to have avoided this scenario. There was little evidence of competition between centres and there was a lot of evidence of sharing and learning from each other. The way in which the framework is presented and the philosophy underpinning its introduction may therefore determine how it is perceived and used.

A pre-determined framework, while measuring a particular set of standards and giving legitimisation to provision which perform well on these standards, could be said to be in danger of depriving learners of the full richness and diversity which should permeate all provision. The quality framework, which has been piloted in this study, is seeking to preserve this richness, and at the same time uphold standards. This shouldn't be taken to mean that there are not any minimum standards that centres should conform to. Such standards can and should be set. What is perhaps more difficult is requiring centres to conform to a range of standards which are not achievable, and which may not in any case be necessary to deliver quality services to particular client groups. As the starting points of ABE provision varies so much and will be influenced by the particular philosophy which the provider or centre aspires to, a so-called *gold standard* to which everyone should aspire to, is perhaps neither desirable nor achievable. The evolving framework, which encourages providers to set their own goals for measuring success, is therefore perhaps a more realistic starting point for evaluation, particularly from the viewpoint of internal evaluation within an organisation. Any system of external evaluation must also be responsive to the particular opportunities and circumstances presented and the needs of the client groups that the centre is seeking to assist. In setting standards it is important to remember that centres cannot be all things to all people.

Putting ideas about quality and quality frameworks into practice also requires skills and abilities, which if not already acquired, must first be mastered. An ability to contribute towards quality improvement depends on a good understanding of the process, and when this is achieved it is possible to carry out tasks more quickly and effectively. The stakeholders need ongoing training support to develop quality within existing projects and to introduce and implement new concepts of quality in new situations. Training to work as on quality management teams, in team management and in delegation of work is essential. Learners also need training and preparation to successfully contribute to the work of the team and to understand the many facets of quality. This will require a lot of time to understand processes and concepts. For example, quality team members need to develop familiarity with guiding principles, master concepts such as performance indicators etc; Models of training in the management of quality need to be developed for all of the stakeholders, if successful outcomes are to be achieved. This research has suggested some ways in which training might be managed for example through the use of a handbook, inclusive workshops etc.

A recurring theme in the study was the need for more time to understand, implement and reflect on processes. For example understanding the specific language of quality management. It is therefore impossible to integrate quality without adequate financial support. This study has shown that as well as paid staff many, other personnel, including learners, are involved and the specific requirements that they present to enable them able to contribute effectively to the process of quality enhancement must be taken into account.¹⁹

Although it was agreed that the application of the quality model could be cumbersome and time-consuming, it was generally recognised that it had the potential to deliver raised standards and efficiency in the longer term. To be effective over the long term, the minimum time necessary for work on the quality statements may be much longer. The project did not have enough time to measure long term effects of change. The major strength of this framework is that stakeholders can identify with it, and relate it to their local circumstances through the development of performance indicators and measures. The time would appear to be right for the development of a quality assurance system, which is both transparent and owned by those, involved in ABE. What has been developed to date needs to be mapped against other self-assessment frameworks currently in operation and obvious omissions addressed.

5.3.10 Methodological limitations

Further issues emerged from the limitations placed by the research methodology used in the study. In particular, the ability of the researcher to remain detached from the process, is a particular problem in action research, and inevitably the researcher's own judgement can influence the course of action or outcomes of the research.

It is difficult if not impossible for the researcher to fully detach from the processes by which new learning takes place, and to refrain from influencing particular views or judgements. The value judgements of the researcher are implicit in the research. For example, in this research the preference for more inclusive and

participatory approaches to measuring quality are implicit and were not disguised, and it is impossible to know how much this influenced either people's willingness to get involved or the kind of response those who were involved made.

This is not necessarily a limitation so long as the problem is acknowledged. In this study much of the early work in determining the framework emerged from the initiation of dialogue with discussion groups. In some cases, discussion emerged naturally with little input from the researcher, while with some groups, ideas required drawing out. Sometimes it was necessary for the researcher to intervene with suggestions (sometimes arising from other discussions), to enable ideas to crystallise. For example, some groups failed to discuss the role of technology in ABE and it was necessary for the researcher to introduce the issue. Where the researcher did introduce an idea, other members of the group sometimes rejected this as irrelevant or invalid. While every attempt was made to allow ideas to emerge or flow from the participants, value judgements about how to introduce and develop ideas were inevitable included by the researcher. It was also difficult to strike a balance between the competing ideas expressed by the group. Some participants were more forthcoming with their ideas than others, and given the time restraints, it was difficult to ensure that everyone's ideas were fully represented in the discussions or to know to what extent silent participants affected the overall results. The research would therefore need to be repeated over and over again to allow a comprehensive framework to emerge. For this reason, it is described as an evolving framework.

Another problem arose in selection of a particular model for implementation in *Phase 2*. This was agreed with other EU partners in the Socrates research project study. Time constraints meant that it was not possible to allow other models to emerge from discussion with stakeholders, and the study revealed that many stakeholders found the particular model selected cumbersome, though as they became more familiar with the model, it was found to be easier to use.

The methodology therefore did impose limitations and different approaches to gathering data with different cohorts could well produce different results. However, the strength of the research is that it has led to the development of new ways of thinking about quality that can be further debated or refined.

5.4 Overview

The research has demonstrated that it is possible to engage ABE providers in a debate about quality assurance. While there are strengths and limitations in developing and implementing the framework a great deal has been learnt by all the participants involved in the process. In addition a framework for development has been established which could be built on for the future. The advantages of an all-inclusive model tailored to the needs of local providers in Northern Ireland have been clearly demonstrated and this may not necessarily conflict with other models of quality assurance. National and local models ought to be able to co-exist side by side and a rationale for this kind of approach should be developed.

What is clear from this project is that the development of inclusive models of quality can deliver raised standards and efficiency that are at the core of current policy in ABE. The process should be seen as developmental and real benefits are likely to emerge as new concepts and processes for measuring quality become more widely understood. A greater emphasis on quality of ABE is timely if we are to improve and widen participation and involve new groups that have traditionally been excluded. Inclusive models that involve all those with a stake in ABE are essential if real change in quality and participation is to be achieved.

¹ The research on *Quality in ABE* carried out in Northern Ireland was part of a European Union funded project on 'Quality and ABE', financed under the Socrates trans-national co-operation projects programme. In 1997 the author of this research was together with three other partners, involved in the preparation of a successful bid for funding for this project. The project arose out of a perceived need to develop a strategy and framework for the implementation of quality standards in ABE, which would have relevance in a European context. The partner organisations in the project were the *National Adult Literacy Agency*,

Dublin, the co-ordinating training and campaigning body for those involved and interested in literacy work in Ireland, *Lire et Ecrire*, a regional association providing support, training and information to literacy schemes in Belgium, *Collectif Alpha*, a provider of ABE programmes both to native Belgians and immigrants, and North Essex Adult Community College a provider of ABE with considerable expertise in the development and piloting of models of quality assurance in the field, and the *Institute of Lifelong Learning*, Queen's University Belfast, represented by the author Rob Mark. The partners were drawn from a variety of organisations with an interest in ABE and included two national organisations, two providers of ABE, and a university, with a role in provision of training for ABE workers. Initially this project was to extend over a one-year period (1998-99). The project made application for a further one year' funding for a pilot implementation programme, and funding was made available under the *EU Socrates Programme* for a further year (1999-00). The first phase of this project involved partner organisations in four regions in the European Union each of which had a special interest in quality issues in adult education. The second phase extended over a one year period (1999-2000) and involved three regions in the EU. North Essex College was not involved in the second year of the project, due to the project worker taking up a new appointment.

Findings in the Northern Ireland research emerged from local discussions and were later assimilated with findings from the other 3 regions, towards a *European Quality Framework* for ABE. This framework was piloted during the second year (1999-2000). Joint meetings were also arranged with other European partners in both the first and second year. In the first year these meetings informed and influenced thinking about quality and how to develop quality models relevant for Northern Ireland, and in the second year they facilitated an interchange about findings in each region from the implementation phase. The *Socrates study* therefore informed thinking in the local study in Northern Ireland.

² The following bodies have responsibility for monitoring ABE in Northern Ireland and use the quality management systems described. *The Department of Education for Northern Ireland* and the *Training and Employment Agency* together has responsibility for ABE throughout the statutory sector. The Department has published its approach to quality assurance in further education colleges in Northern Ireland (1999) *Improving Quality: raising Standards*. This emphasises an internal and an external dimension to the assessment of quality, with emphasis both on quantitative and qualitative indicators. The *Training and Employment Agency* (T&EA), has also developed a quality framework through its employment training *Jobskills Quality Management System* (JQMS), which is used in all recognised training organisations (RTO's), providing ABE. An external assessor may use this framework, in the form of a manual, for self-assessment and self-evaluation prior to review. The JQMS system offers a dynamic process that is a blend of the quality management systems *ISO* and *Total Quality Management*, described in chapter 4. The T&EA also has also responsibility for open learning centres. The *British Association for Open Learning* (BAOL) has produced standards for quality assessment in open learning. All centres offering courses accredited by any of the bodies awarding qualifications must conform to the quality assurance systems of the relevant body, before permission is granted to offer courses. The quality assurance systems of the awarding bodies are based on *The Common Accord* (1997) an agreement for measuring quality in open learning centres.

³ Three further consultations were held in spring 1999. The first was the City of Derry also know as Londonderry, and was attended by representatives from the counties of Londonderry, Tyrone and Donegal, the later county being across the border in the Republic of Ireland. A similar group met in Armagh, to which staffs from neighbouring counties in the Republic of Ireland were invited. There was also a second meeting in the Armagh area with a group of volunteer tutors working in community settings.

⁴ Questions puts to participants were as follows: What do participants attending this colloquium think constitutes quality provision in ABE? What do tutors in local centres think constitutes quality provision in ABE? What do learners in local centres think constitute provision in ABE? The later two questions required participants to go back to their centres and ascertain views. It was agreed that information could be gathered through group discussion or by requesting people to write down their thoughts. In this way the consultations were considerably extended. The groups were asked to return a written summary of their findings, which were later summarised into a single document.

⁵ The framework that is presented here represents issues raised by stakeholder groups involved in the research in Northern Ireland. This framework was later combined with findings from two other EU regions and a workbook to assist practitioners in the implementation of the framework was produced. Issues in Northern Ireland were very similar to those emerging in the other regions. There were some additions to the framework from other regions. For example, an additional guiding principle -*guiding principle 1*: the right to voluntary attendance was proposed elsewhere and included in the framework. The quality statements listed were identified by the local teams in Northern Ireland, with some additional elements being added to the workbook from the Socrates project, for example, the right to 1 to 1 tuition, described in *Quality Statement 3*, was added from discussions with stakeholders in the Republic of Ireland and the Belgian partners also proposed an additional guiding principle, '*that human rights must be respected*' and the framework allows for such inclusions. As those involved in implementing the framework in *Phase 2* would choose the statements they wanted to work on and modify them accordingly if necessary, this was not seen as an impediment. Rather it was felt that a more elaborated framework might serve to widen and challenge understanding. The framework was not thought to be exhaustive and it was anticipated that it would be refined and developed in the next phase of the project.

⁶ The statements were summarised in a unified framework listed in *annex 3* and summarised in a workbook. This workbook put the ideas of all the groups together, and was later used as a resource for evaluation teams during the implementation process. Criteria for evaluating the quality statements were drawn up by the Socrates project team to assist with the piloting process. The stakeholders were invited not only to put the elements already in place into context, by applying it to the work of their own centre or organisation, but also to include additional key elements they considered essential to the management and delivery of good practice in ABE. Guidelines for the implementation phase accompanied the workbook.

⁷ Experiences of those involved in *phase 1* were recorded through group discussions at a one-day seminar held in July 1999 in Dublin. This seminar, at the end of *phase 1*, provided an opportunity to share information about the quality framework, which had emerged from discussions with the stakeholders who had participated in the research. It also provided an opportunity to elicit views about existing quality models and procedures currently in operation among providers. It also provided an opportunity to discuss how the emerging framework might be piloted.

⁸ Only in the *Regional Training Organisations* (RTOs) was a consistent quality assurance approach in operation. Others reported experience of measures, which they felt were bureaucratic and failed to register the true quality of the learning they provided. Some felt they were victims in a system, which is over concerned with quantitative detail. They claimed they had neither time nor resources to initiate or develop additional appropriate quality measures.

⁹ The implementation phase of the project lasted for approximately five months from January to June 2000. Many of those who participated later noted that this was a very short time to carry out investigations.

¹⁰ A common approach to implementing the agreed framework was developed with the two other EU project partners. The quality framework set out in *annex 3*, was packaged into a *workbook* for practitioners and entitled *The Evolving Quality Framework* (1999). It summarises the findings from *phase 1*. The Socrates project was advised by Dr Juliet Merrifield, Director of the *Learning from Experience Trust*, Goldsmith's College at the University of London, who proposed the chosen framework for implementation, which is based on a *Total Quality Management* approach, and is set out in *Figure 2*. Dr Merrifield acted as consultant to the Socrates project.

¹¹ Details about *Phase 2* of the project were circulated to approximately sixty providers. Thirty-nine of these indicated an interest in continuing their involvement or joining the project and their representatives either attended the initial training for *Phase 2* or asked to be kept informed of the progress of the project. Some of the centres indicated their wish to participate, but due to local circumstances, were unable to do so. Issues preventing involvement included unavailability for training and development, prior commitments, and difficulties in travelling to meetings. The numbers who attended the first meeting was also less than those who initially committed themselves to involvement. This was because some were unable to set up a local evaluation team or later found that they were unable to provide the time needed for involvement. Inability to provide extra funding to centres to support participation was found to be a barrier for some. Participants had to find time from their existing budgets and funding for items such as travel or additional expenses incurred as a result of participation. It was unclear whether some decided not to get involved because they did not see the model as worthy of testing. The new focus on quality by the newly formed *Basic Skills Unit* in Northern Ireland, which asked schemes to get involved in consultation meetings about quality, may also have led to some withdrawals, though this was not expressly given as a reason for non-involvement. While many groups contributed indirectly to *Phase 2*, for example, by sending comments or giving views on the telephone, it was the 14 centres that formed the core of this phase. Not all developed local evaluation teams and not all were able to complete work within the time-scale of the project. In *Phase 2*, evaluation teams worked from four locations- from Queen's University Belfast (covering a range of centres noted in *annex 2*); from the North West (covering the City of Derry/Londonderry and Donegal); in the North Down area (at a further education college based in the two large urban centres, Bangor and Newtownards, serving as *dormitory* towns for Belfast); and at a training centre in Downpatrick, Co. Down. The local teams, known as *evaluation teams*, were provided with information, training and ongoing support for implementation. Meetings were set up to monitor progress, and a final evaluation meeting was organised in Dublin at the end of *Phase 2* in June 2000. This final meeting enabled participants to examine and discuss how the process had worked in Northern Ireland and to share information about their findings. It also provided an opportunity to exchange information with teams from the other Socrates project regions who were piloting the framework in a similar way.

¹² The evaluation criteria bring the *guiding principles* and the *quality statements* together. Participants were asked to develop additional evaluation criteria for the quality statements if they felt this was appropriate. Participants were encouraged to think of the framework as a tool rather than a prescriptive framework.

¹³ No single indicator says everything important about a provider. Indicators about different aspects of the provider's work will therefore be necessary and indicators should be capable of measurement. An indicator is only useful if it can be demonstrated to what extent a provider is achieving it. Four types of indicators can be identified as follows: **Input indicators** – are resources put into the programme. They could be financial, could relate to materials available, the level of training of staff, resources which a student brings to the programme or conditions available to support performance. **Process indicators** relate to how a scheme operates regardless of the resources available for example organisational support for the learning experience. **Output indicators** relate to the end results of the input or process employed by the provider. **Outcome indicators** track long term progress of the scheme for example, progression and employability or independence, helping children to learn etc.

¹⁴ The author, Rob Mark, delivered a training programme tailored to the local circumstances of the evaluation teams, assisted by another experienced practitioner and trainer in ABE, Mrs Margaret Donaghey. A common training programme was agreed with the other two socrates partners at a meeting in Dublin to enable comparisons to be made with other regions. The same model as agreed with the other partners and documented in the *ABE Quality Framework –A Process for Implementation (Figure 2)*, was used in Northern Ireland.

¹⁵ The evaluation teams represented a cross section of providers from different geographical locations across Northern Ireland included tutors, managers, volunteers and learners. Those involved included representatives from training organisations, colleges, the local ABE support unit (the Basic Skills Unit) and the community and voluntary sector. Representation from different providers was seen as a critical part of the consultation process.

¹⁶ The initial training programme lasted two full days. The first day of the programme included an outline of the project and its achievements in the first year of operation and an examination of the workbook (1999) *Evolving Quality Framework for ABE*, which had been prepared to assist with implementation. Participants were also introduced to the process for implementation. (Figure 2) The first two stages of the process (i.e. the development of performance indicators and measures), were addressed through group-work or through 1:1 situations. Ongoing support was made available on request to teams, either in their own centres, at the project base, by telephone, fax, email or any combination of these as required. Those attending the training and development were asked to complete the following tasks:- examine guidelines for implementation; familiarise themselves with the quality statements; focus on one or more quality statement(s) which could be developed within their local provision; become familiar with the implementation process through discussion of the terminology and its meaning; prepare material for dissemination in their centre; plan for ongoing contact and feedback from tasks carried out for example comments on guidelines. The approach proved to be a very successful model for the first day of training, though more time would have been needed to examine and discuss each item. In the second day, centres agreed the quality statement(s), they would work on, and gave an explanation for their choice. Some providers chose the same statements and they were encouraged to collaborate with each other, particularly where there were small numbers. There were also representatives of the newly established *Basic Skills Unit*, and this enabled a sharing of information about quality issues between practitioners and regional support staff. Following the training session, team members were asked to continue working on their chosen quality statement(s) with other staff and learners in their centres, using the agreed implementation process. Further support to complete tasks was available for each centre if required. Sometimes this took the form of visits to centres while in other cases contact was maintained by telephone or by letter. Team representatives were asked to report back on outcomes using the method for their centre. Some chose to report back through meetings while other preferred to telephone, fax, or e-mail their findings.

¹⁷ These comments arose from discussions with stakeholders at meetings held during *Phase 2* with the evaluation teams. Some of the comments were made when the evaluation teams met together and other were made at meetings with specific teams. Sometimes the issues were included in the written comments submitted by individuals or groups. A final evaluation meeting in Dublin at the end of June 2000 provided an opportunity for representatives from all three participating EU regions to meet together and exchange views.

¹⁸ The consistent availability of team members for regular meetings is a priority and can only be ensured by providing funding to facilitate release from duties. Evaluation teams should not be allowed to develop an elite status and others, outside the evaluation team, may be called upon to carry out agreed tasks. Teams could pose questions to others; ask for help, for example, in carrying out surveys, or in designing questionnaires. In larger organisations more than one evaluation team might be set up. When possible, teams could have opportunity to liaise with others working on the same statement.

¹⁹ Funding is essential to ensure success in embedding the work on quality. It is most meaningful when integrated into the routine work of the centre. It can be considered as the normal work of the centre, but carried out in a different way to improve provision.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

‘Literacy is important for communication and making informed decisions. It is a necessary ingredient for citizenship, community participation and a sense of belonging. Literacy is a tool for efficient learning, particularly self-directed learning of the sort that is enabled by information and communication technologies.’ Final Report, International Adult Literacy Survey (2000)

‘Poor levels of literacy disadvantage individuals in accessing and contributing to the socio-economic benefits that can be obtained within a community. In a new era of peace and prosperity in Northern Ireland it is all the more important that everyone has the opportunity to share in its future role.’ Raising our Sights (2000:3)

This research study has reminded us that literacy and ABE is a complex and contested field of enquiry. Early on it became clear that literacy was difficult to define, and the aims and goals of ABE and ways of measuring success were no less problematic. With so many conflicting viewpoints it is difficult to reach agreement about the rationale for literacy or ways of working which everyone can adhere to or respect. Different pedagogies of teaching and learning, and opposing social, economic and political perspectives, all highlight the complexities in agreeing common perspectives. Practices are to a large extent determined by financial considerations, and since the public purse is the key financier of ABE, politicians and their advisors therefore tend to influence how we think about literacy and how we provide for need. Since ABE learners tend to come from the most economically disadvantaged sections of society, they do not have any economic power and are consequently not considered seriously in the decision making process.

In this concluding chapter, I will summarise key issues emerging from the research and will discuss the controversies that the study raises. Findings imply a need to rethink policies and practices in ABE, and in particular there is a need to widen participation and to develop more inclusive ways of measuring success. To begin with, I will examine the issues that the study has highlighted in defining and measuring participation and success in adult literacy. The systematic measurement of quality of programmes presupposes that educators know what is needed. This study has shown that literacy needs are constantly changing, which makes it difficult to agree about what should be central to the field of study. This divergence of opinion about literacy is examined, and the implications for developing common standards in ABE. The need to widen participation in ABE is a recurring theme in the research, and its implications for practice and quality management is discussed. Many of the problems presented in this research arise from a lack of agreement about basic philosophies and ideologies in ABE and differing viewpoints emerge from different starting points.

Core values, aims and objectives, activities and approaches vary in different contexts and there does not seem to be an approach to quality management that embraces different ideologies and practices in ABE. It would seem that dominant views about literacy are currently stifling the debate about how participation and success might be improved, and are imposing models which do not have widespread agreement. This is impeding progress towards new approaches to measuring participation and success that have widespread agreement. While what constitutes quality and success in ABE might be said to be different in contrasting learning environments, there is a need to identify common concomitants of success. This will enable us to conceptualise what is possible to achieve and will enable comparisons and demarcations between the different sectors of provision to be drawn. This research demonstrates that common frameworks, that respect diversity, are possible and the need to think differently about literacy in the new century and to develop new contexts within the framework of lifelong learning is paramount.

6.1 The limitations of quality models

To begin with, the study has raised a number of questions about how we interpret quality in education and in ABE in particular. The complexities associated with defining or interpreting quality and its application to ABE, is a recurring theme. Issues raised in the quality debate are part of a wider conundrum that educationalists try to grapple with when talking about quality. How and what we measure in education have been hotly debated by educational theorists, practitioners and policy makers. Earlier in *Chapter 4*, the contested nature of quality, and the many problems which it raises were highlighted. Issues such as what we mean by quality and what we are trying to measure were examined, and the need for new approaches to understanding quality was established. Problems raised

by applying industrial models of quality to the education context were examined and the tension between external accountability and internal evaluation. On the one hand governments want to create a *gold standard* of measurement that can be used to compare performance across provision. On the other hand, providers don't want to be judged by *absolute standards* or be compared with other providers. They want to have a say in deciding the criteria by which success can be judged, and make their own judgements about their performance.

Models for measuring success in industry have been taken from industrial and business contexts where literacy provision exists in formal learning environments. Models such as *Total Quality Management*, *International Organisation for Standardisation*, and *Investors in People* outlined in *annex 1*, have been applied to ABE contexts, where ABE co-exists with formal education courses. But since ABE is often developed and delivered in a very different way to formal provision, it is not easily equated with these forms of measurement. Often too, ABE is delivered in non-formal learning environments and requires approaches to measurement that respect the very different circumstances that this creates. More recently attempts to develop quality frameworks, for ABE learners, have been devised. In *Chapter 4*, the *Equipped for the Future* model devised by the USA's *National Institute for Literacy (2000)* was examined. In the UK, the *Basic Skills Unit (2001)* after consultation with a range of providers, have recently developed and published core curriculum standards for ABE.

6.2 The need to involve stakeholders

The problem with standards developed by groups that are appointed to develop quality standards is that they often do not include the voice of learners or their representatives. Such models tend to reflect the goals and perspectives of their architects, who are charged with responsibilities by their political masters and who provide the financial resources. These groups reach consensus by consulting with groups such as managers, teachers, and employers. The customers or learners or those who can represent their views are excluded from the process. This result is the development of a framework that is incomplete because it does not take account of democratic processes that allow the grassroots to influence philosophical and ethical viewpoints and pedagogic considerations, which develop from a learner centred philosophy.

Managers are given the responsibility for implementing new policies and quality measurements, which often include targets. These targets often look at factors such as numbers participating, qualifications obtained, per capita costs, and progression to the labour market. The views of individual learners are only considered in relation to how the learning contributed to these objectives. In contrast many teachers are aware of the need to engage adults in the process and to develop models for assessing quality which can bring educational benefits to individuals and communities. These social and educational goals develop from their experience working as adult educators in the community and in dialogue with learners and community activists. They often conflict with the views of employers or managers, but they are unable to have their voice heard in the debate. With no prospect of changing things, they are powerless to create a climate that could lead to wider participation and to improvements for individuals and communities.

6.3 The challenge to existing approaches

Particular views about quality and how it is measured continue to influence policy and practice, and funding mechanisms require managers to apply approaches that have been handed down as a *fait accompli*. The value judgements implicit in this approach continue to shape provision, and alternative views hold little weight in effecting change. For example, the need to prioritise the core skills of reading and writing in the curriculum take precedence over valuing local culture and language, or the development of trust and confidence among learners. The result is that these dominant views about quality and measuring success leads to a standardisation of provision which results in a *sameness* of provision, which does not acknowledge the richness and diversity of different starting points.

The right of all the stakeholders to be involved in the decision making process has been advocated in this research. If quality frameworks do not have approval from all those with an interest in the process of education, which includes the customers, it could be argued that standards will simply reflect the views of some. Others such as tutors or learners who cannot identify with these dominant views may then feel alienated or marginalised and some may opt out as a result. The research reported in this study has included a learner and community perspective, and has demonstrated that the adult learner

can contribute towards shaping policies and practices in ABE. Policy makers and officials have not yet applied a more inclusive approach to ABE. The reason for this is unclear. Perhaps the experts feel they know best and want to keep control with those who implement government policy? The issue goes to the very heart of the democratic process, and raises questions about the right of individuals to choose the type of education they feel most appropriate to their needs.

This problem is perhaps a microcosm of a wider problem that results from a difference in understanding about what quality in education is seeking to achieve. It assumes that standards must be uniform, and that bureaucrats and quality managers must be the custodians of quality models. These models are handed down from the top and do not allow for differences in approach to measuring quality or for the need to involve everyone, including learners in assessing and validating quality.

6.4 Values and quality

Armstrong (2000) says that economy, efficiency and effectiveness have been the key issues in influencing the quality debate in the UK. The need to focus on economic benefits for learning with the expectation that this will lead to greater economic efficiency by enhancing individual life chances or by improving economic performance and social cohesion, has been to the forefront in the debate about quality. This has led to a focussing on certain questions such as what economic benefits will it bring, what will it cost and will it be value for money? Armstrong argues that such questions have reduced the *social capital* and life satisfaction of a vast proportion of the population, whose experience of learning have been restricted to instrumental skills-based training or learning leading to qualification outcomes, but not necessarily employment. While the learning is linked to the needs of the economy, it may not necessarily lead to the implied benefits. This raises the question as to what extent job related learning outcomes should be taken into account in assessing the value of learning? We must also question whether learning which is not job linked be any less valid?

Issues of equity and fairness have also raised questions for those concerned with quality enhancement and recognising diversity of need. It is well recognised that adult learners participating in a learning programme do so for a variety of reasons. The standardisation of the meaning of quality may therefore become problematic if issues of equality or equity are not introduced into the increasingly complex equation. The distinction has implications that impact on quality. The moral imperative calls on us to be concerned about the needs of minority groups, and there is also a legal requirement. The assumption is that we should be able to widen participation and provide equal access for all. However, access in itself is not sufficient, as the current vogue for widening participation is making apparent. If there is to be equality of opportunities for achievement, more needs to be done in terms of providing additional support for learning. This may well mean providing additional resources for some individuals or groups rather than others. Those with positive prior learning experiences tend to accumulate more. This has implications for determining what constitutes quality. If learning is efficient, but only effective for some, then measurement of quality is problematic on the grounds of failing to contribute to equality. It might be argued there can be no quality without equality.

Our understanding of quality will also influence the kind of measurements used in attaching value or worth. Politicians and their administrators have different priorities to teachers, learners or community representatives and so their understanding of what quality is and how to measure it is likely to be at variance. Nevertheless they are increasingly becoming aware of the need to listen to others, including learners, if they are to succeed in their objectives. Educationalists too are becoming more aware of the need for inclusive dialogue in the curriculum. Traditionally they have defined objectives or outcomes and methods of evaluation, yet more and more the views of learners are valued in deciding what will be taught and how.

The quality model that emerged from this research indicated that stakeholders were aware of the multi-faceted nature of quality and the need for developing principles and practices that are underpinned by sound pedagogical and theoretical considerations. For example the guiding principles, agreed by all the partners, indicated a willingness to engage in debate about equality and ethical considerations. This is important in generating views which will ultimately lead to the development of a framework based on a core values and opinions.

6.5 The importance of customers' views

The need to take account of customer or learner needs in ABE is important, because many adults do not want to join provision that is seen as inappropriate or irrelevant. In reality however, it is not always possible to give equal consideration to individuals or client groups, particularly in the formal sector. This is because of restrictions of funding which emphasise the need to acquire specific skills and qualifications. These may be unwanted by the learner, and therefore serve as a deterrent rather than an incentive to learn.

Learners want to engage in learning, which is relevant to their everyday lives. It is easier for providers in the non-formal sector to respond to these needs as they are often not tied to the same kind of restrictions existing in the formal sector, often influenced by qualification and job related outcomes. The focus on quality has to a large extent centred on providers in the formal sector of education and training where approaches to measuring quality may need to be different to the non-formal sector, where learning takes place in very different circumstances, and where there are very different circumstances. The non-formal sector may be better placed to reach out to excluded groups and in to break down barriers and widen participation and measures or benchmarks of quality must take into account the particular ways in which this sector needs to respond to learners in order to achieve success. The approaches to measuring quality in this more formalised sector may indeed by necessity need to be quite different to those most appropriate for learning in the non-formal sector, where learning takes place in very different circumstances, and where there are not the same constraints.

Ideological, moral, and ethical issues are likely to influence our understanding of quality. In ABE practice, what is understood by quality will vary depending on a range of circumstances such as definitions of literacy, ethics and values, and political and economic ideologies, which are interpreted differently in local contexts. The current focus on quality of education and training has to a large extent focussed on providers in the formal sector of education and training. However, the dilemma for the educator is that unless there is some broad agreement about measures of quality, it will be difficult to make comparisons across provision. One might well ask whether such comparisons are indeed necessary? While it is possible to compare quantitative data on participation and non-participation in ABE in differing learning contexts, ways of operating may be so different and the factors influencing success so varied, that it might be unproductive or misleading to compare provision. Such comparisons might lead to misconceptions about achievements, and could damage the self-perception of success by local providers or participants. Models of self-evaluation, such as the one which has emerged in this study, may indeed be the only valid approach to evaluation in an age when diversity of provision and need is so prevalent.

Most educators do recognise the need for evaluation or measurement of performance. There is an acknowledgement that a focus on quality issues in ABE is important and the need to develop a culture, which accepts the development of a quality-conscious culture. The study showed that stakeholders reacted very favourably to being given an opportunity to play a role in developing a model for managing quality in ABE. The fact that the model was owned by rather than imposed on the stakeholders seemed to have a positive impact on how they viewed the quality process. Stakeholders reported many benefits from being involved in a decision-making process that raised questions about what to measure and how to measure it. Neither did quality study find any evidence of apathy about discussing quality issues. This suggests that if ABE stakeholders are involved in a process where their views are respected and listened to, this will have many beneficial effects for the development and implementation of models for measuring quality in ABE.

In the search for new approaches to measuring quality, the need for national systems in setting benchmarks to evaluate success should therefore take account of the views of the consumer. The role of the individual learner in deciding policy and practice has not been central to government thinking. This research has shown that the consumer or learner can make a valuable contribution to the debate about quality and the kind of service that should develop.

6.6 The limits of a stakeholders' model

One of the problems in defining quality in ABE is knowing what it is we want to measure. In this research, the quality framework study was developed from what the stakeholders said about quality. *Chapter 5* showed that participants in the research were asked to begin by defining what aspect of

quality they felt was most relevant. Later they were asked to develop and test measures to evaluate success. As the framework was stakeholder led, this meant that only issues identified by participants in the research were included in the framework. This meant that a number of issues which others might consider central to quality were not there. What emerged from the framework was something that was developed and owned by stakeholders, but which was incomplete. The implementation of the framework takes account of this weakness through the notion of an evolving process, which accepts further refinements according to needs that emerge. This means that as time goes on, the framework will expand and develop. A problem with this approach is that it assumes that stakeholders will eventually identify the kind of issues that educationalists or quality managers want to be examined. But what if they don't identify these issues? There is also a risk that the framework will become cumbersome or overloaded. Certainly as the process evolves, there would seem to be a growing need for sophisticated management. There would also be a need to provide opportunities, to refine the model, to challenge it, and to ensure that it continues to be a relevant tool for ABE providers. The framework that emerged from this research developed goal setting and instructional tools, which included a workbook to assist quality managers to take control over the process and other instructional materials for implementation. Measurements have been developed for each agreed statement and providers have indicated that they are useful in diagnosing specific strengths and weaknesses. So a process has been initiated to determine what kinds of tools need to be included in a new assessment system and teachers, managers, policymakers, and learners have all contributed to this process. A next step might be to establish mechanisms for comparisons to be made across providers. However, improving the quality of provision will require more than simply changes to individual programmes. It will require changes in management that enable the new approach to permeate thinking and to bring about change. Once this change in practice has demonstrated its value, it will be easier to gain acceptance across providers.

6.7 Adults and the basic education curriculum

A further issue raised by this study concerns what literacy skills and knowledge adults need to have. The study has shown that there is little agreement about what ABE is or may be seeking to achieve. *Chapter 1* revealed the very many meanings and interpretations that exist in defining ABE and *Chapter 2* surveyed the local context in adult basic education practice. Our understanding of literacy is constantly changing and different practices are emerging to meet new challenges in ABE. With so many changes it might be said to be difficult if not impossible to define measurements of quality that can be applied in different contexts.

Much of the current rhetoric about literacy in the UK stresses literacy as a set of skills. This, however, does not adequately encompass the complexity of human experience as felt in the daily lives of adults. Although ABE may be about mastering technical skills such as reading and writing, it is also about interaction with the social world. The complexities of the interconnections between skills, knowledge and the social world are recognised in this research, but many aspects of experience were also missing. While new measurements may emerge as the framework develops, it is also likely that the stakeholders will continue to reflect the current emphasis on skills as contained in policy documents. This highlights a weakness in a stakeholder model where ABE tutors and managers give priority to what is working well. This can sometimes militate against innovation and the need to be creative and develop new ideas. Ways of overcoming this weakness will not be easy to implement. While it is possible that the quality model identified in this research could lead to innovation in thinking, it cannot be guaranteed. In the research study meetings to share ideas and reflect on progress were encouraged. This enabled groups to reflect on the process of evaluation and its relative strengths and weaknesses. Additional ways of informing practice and quality evaluation might also include conferences and forums to encourage national debate in ABE. Such events might encourage the identification of practices, which would widen participation. Another possibility could be to give guidance to stakeholders, for example, on policy and innovation, to assist with the developments of new ideas. The challenge will be to be able to inform stakeholders on key issues, and at the same time preserve the right to agree criteria for measurement, appropriate to the local context, without compromising the right of the stakeholders to develop their own priorities for measurement. There may also be a case for developing some kind of advisory service that has an overview of provision and needs, and which can advise providers on their quality procedures and assist them in identifying weakness or gaps.

A further issue, raised by the study, concerns the scope of the ABE curriculum. Traditionally ABE has been concerned with reading and writing skills, but as we have seen in *chapter 1*, literacy is constantly

changing and there is now a tendency to include a much wider range of skills. The *'Equipped For the Future'* report (2000),¹ include communication skills which adults need for access to information such as reading, writing, listening, speaking, and observing, and skills that adults need to have to carry out their daily tasks. This includes public speaking, acting effectively in different roles, interpersonal skills, and decision-making and learning skills, which are higher order or critical thinking skills. The report emphasises the need for learning through doing, reflecting, evaluating, applying ICT skills, motivation to remove barriers to learn and developing strategies for overcoming blocks and barriers.

The research carried out in Northern Ireland identified both similar and different issues, which is hardly surprising, given the context of learning is very different. What is useful about the EFF research is that it provides a national framework, which can influence thinking about quality management. This is useful if not essential in encouraging innovation. There is a need for information to inform discussion about what the core areas of ABE might be and we cannot assume that stakeholders can develop effective quality approaches, without this kind of support. Stakeholders may of course reject suggestions or advice but are likely to be influenced by the concerns of funding bodies.

6.8 Do we need comparable standards?

The research study has shown that the need for standards, which measure participation and success in ABE, is widely accepted. Perhaps what is more complex is how to achieve agreement about comparing standards across provision, or indeed whether it is desirable or necessary to compare standards at all. If we assume some broad consensus is necessary as governments and employers normally do, building a broad-based consensus could be said to be as a first step in developing evolving standards that are also comparable and which will meet with requirements of quality managers. Unless there is broad agreement about what can be achieved, and on what is critical in measurement, it will be difficult to agree common standards. Perhaps the strength of this research is that it is a first step towards an agreed framework, which has broad consensus among stakeholder groups. What the framework contains may be open to controversy, but the research has shown that it is possible to develop an acceptable framework that is capable of development. Since there is a broad ownership among stakeholders, it has a good chance of achieving a broad acceptance and is likely to lead to agreement about standards and measures comparable across provision. So it could be a useful tool that seeks to set goals and common standards of measurement for ABE. The involvement of adult learners is important in facilitating understanding about what ABE skills and knowledge mean to adults, which will in turn assist in developing and improving provision and widening access. Society also benefits by more learners building the knowledge and skills they need to fully participate in the economic, political and social life of the nation.

While an agreement on what should be included in a quality framework is an essential step, it is certainly not the only action that must be taken. Agreement on the broad aims and objectives and critical knowledge and skills is simply the first stage in a developmental process, which will require multiple changes in practice, management and policy. In all of these processes the stakeholders have together a major role to play. Constructing the framework has demonstrated that much can be achieved from working together. It has focused on developing tools for measuring success and has brought together many different groups of people in pursuit of improving quality in ABE. Perhaps the next task will centre around how to involve other interested parties, such as employers, unions, skill standard boards, and other educational institutions where learners might progress on to, and who were not included in the initial research. Their input may well create tensions between stakeholders and ultimately change the kind of framework that emerges. To promote such inclusiveness, it will be essential to communicate how the system contributes to broader community and national goals.

6.9 New target groups and the quality perspective

We have seen that a major issue in ABE is getting more adults involved from under-represented groups. The research has shown that the issues, affecting participation in ABE, are complex. Participation in ABE is influenced by a set of interrelated factors, which can affect an individual's ability to succeed. Barriers fall broadly into three distinct clusters-physical and material barriers such as finance and time, structural barriers around the way education and training is provided and attitudinal barriers, including confidence and motivation. The non-learners are not a homogenous group. They include those affected by the barriers described above many of who are disaffected. The task of ABE providers is to seek to maximise the participation and performance of existing groups in

ABE, but also to encourage participation from new groups of learners, who for one reason or another, have been excluded from provision. Providers must therefore seek ways of widening participation, which will involve new and diverse groups of learners.

The problem of exclusion and non-participation in ABE raises questions about equality of access to provision and about how to develop quality measures that encourage wider participation from under-represented groups. In one sense, it might be argued that everyone who participates in ABE or who has literacy needs is disadvantaged in relation to post-basic adults. However, within ABE itself, there are particular groups of learners, who are hard to reach and who do not willingly engage in learning.

There is no single solution and approaches to ameliorating the situation have been wide ranging. This research has shown that many factors have brought this situation about. The task of educators is to minimise these barriers to participation and to do so in a way that will lead to the widest possible involvement of those who for one reason or another cannot move forward. It is also the educators responsibility to develop ways of monitoring progress in tackling these issues. While many adults are benefiting from existing provision, there is currently no systematic way of monitoring how successful the provision is. Nor is there any way of monitoring what has been done to widen participation to include underrepresented groups. Recent government reports have highlighted the need to be concerned about the quality of ABE provision and to be concerned with wider social goals of social cohesion and inclusion by opening up provision to new client groups.

All the evidence shows that getting more adults to participate in ABE is a huge problem and mammoth task. In Northern Ireland many of the issues affecting participation were found to be similar to those elsewhere, but there are also problems specific to the local context. There is a need to rethink education to enable excluded adults to overcome these barriers and sensitive strategies need to be developed to encourage others to take up learning opportunities. The quality model that emerged from this study did not single out widening participation as a key issue, nor was it identified as a key issue in the core or guiding principles of the framework. Stakeholders raised questions such as a suitable curriculum, appropriate learning environment, appropriate promotional strategies, adequate staff training etc; all of which are indirectly related to widening participation. While improvements such as those suggested by the research will undoubtedly lead to improvements in widening participation, how to make strategies for improving participation for particular groups may need to become more central to thinking about developing quality frameworks, and to the debate about quality and ABE. The particular groups who might benefit are varied, and it might be argued that unless there is a special focus on the needs of each group, it might be argued that those who are less vocal or whose needs are more difficult to meet, or who are less central to policy thinking, could be left out or forgotten about. Such groups might include people of different ethnic origins, gypsies, travellers, asylum seekers, ex-offenders, people with mental health problems, the physically and mentally disabled etc; The list is indeed considerable and all have particular needs which ABE providers need to consider.

The research study reported in *chapter 5* identified aspects relevant to the equality debate. For example, the *guiding principles* referred to the need to respect for cultural difference and the right to attend provision on a voluntary basis. These elements provide a useful starting point. The right of individuals to access ABE on this basis, not included in the guiding principles developed in Northern Ireland, is also central to protecting the rights of minority groups and ensuring that their particular needs are not forgotten about. This calls for legislation to protect the needs of minority groups. Governments have legal and moral responsibilities to uphold individual rights. Decisions about what to provide in ABE and how to spend public resources should not rest exclusively with stakeholders. Dialogue between those whose job it is to develop policy and fund ABE and those whose job it is to implement policy and develop appropriate provision, must therefore be part of the equation. In this sense, approaches to quality that advocate consensus building between stakeholders, may therefore provide an important forum for discussion and a bridge between policy decisions which are in the common good and developing practices to meet these needs. The study showed that stakeholders are aware of the many issues that effect participation in ABE.² What is needed is the political will to develop dialogue between stakeholders and to provide resources to address problems identified. Quality models can identify issues for improvement, and availability of adequate resources will be crucial to effecting change and ensuring that issues identified are addressed.

These issues must be addressed, if participation levels are to be improved, and if learners with ABE needs are to be encouraged to engage in meaningful learning. At the local level, planners and

managers of programmes, and those who teach on programmes must be more concerned about issues of widening participation and reaching *hard to reach* groups. To ensure adults achieve successful learning outcomes and are able to realise their goals and progress on to the next step, sensitive strategies must be identified. Issues of widening participation and organisation, management and delivery of the learning are inextricably linked. The evolving quality framework described in this study, enables stakeholders to evaluate critically and develop measures that can affect the whole learning process and as such provide a useful starting point. Success is partly to do with what is on offer and how it is achieving its objectives and educationalists must develop solutions to the problems of widening participation and must develop ways of measuring success. While providers alone may not have the power to remove all of the obstacles, they can empower learners to overcome barriers and highlight changes that are needed to facilitate wider involvement.

So strategies to encourage inclusiveness cannot be divorced from the debate about quality. Indeed it might be argued that programmes can only be judged to be successful if they are sensitive to providing for everyone's need. Issues of quality can and should be linked to issues of equity of access. Quality requires equal access to opportunities for special groups to improve their ABE skills. If this principle is accepted, then the issues which widening participation raises become central to the quality debate in ABE.

6.10 Working with other professionals

While the educator may have responsibilities to examine ways of improving practices in ABE, educationalists alone cannot effect change. Solutions to improving provision and to widening participation in ABE are dependent on a range of other inter-related factors. Those who work in related services, such as health, social work, community work or the voluntary sector have also a role to play in developing provision. For example, they can assist in providing premises, additional funding etc; Others groups too, such as trade union and employers, might also be able to make a contribution to developments. Together they can contribute to shaping the kind of service offered and ensuring that as many as possible can benefit from it. The politicians and bureaucrats who shape policies, and the managers, teachers and other professionals whose job it is to implement these policies, together hold the key to improving participation and success.

A problem with this approach is that it is based on a top down approach that then influences practice on the ground rather than one that is responsive to grassroots opinion. The contribution which individuals within communities and their representatives can make towards informing policies and practices designed to affect the lives of so many is often overlooked or paid lip service to in this model. Sometimes representatives of communities are invited to participate in policy bodies, but more often it is left to other professionals to conceptualise their views and the views of individuals who have ABE needs and not participating in existing provision are simply forgotten. A developmental process emerges which is flawed because it excludes learner and non-participants from involvement in developing policies and practices. The political rhetoric acknowledges that community participation in decision-making is absolutely crucial both to the democratic process and to achieving successful educational outcomes, but in practice it has not happened.

6.11 New contexts for learning

Part of the problem in increasing participation arises from the particular type of provision that is currently offered. There is a preponderance of vocationally based courses leading to qualifications and located in the formal sector. This particular approach, while relevant for some, is not serving the wider needs of adults. While some adults are often happy to fit into existing structures and provision many remain isolated and disaffected, not just because they do not want to engage in the type of learning on offer, but because they have not found the right kind of supportive learning environment to meet their needs.

Increasingly new learning contexts, which enable ABE learners to develop skills and knowledge through activities based on everyday life experience, are acknowledged as an alternative to the dominant type of provision. This kind of learning is different, as the learning needs are first generated by communities and local *experts*, who assist with development of the knowledge or skills identified as needed in the local communities. Here educational processes are organised and managed in very different ways and obtaining formal qualifications is, in the main, not part of the process. Ways of

evaluating participation and success in this kind of approach are normally left up to individual groups to identify and it is perhaps here that the consensual model of measuring quality identified in this research may have a particular applicability. This was found to be so with many of the community groups involved in this research study who embraced the quality framework with great enthusiasm and zeal. The research showed that it was possible to engage representatives from diverse backgrounds in a debate about measuring quality in ABE, and in arriving at a consensus on how to measure quality in different learning contexts.

The research represented a first step in bringing together representatives from community groups to develop an agreed quality framework for practice. The study showed that dialogue could promote an understanding of conflicting demands placed on each stakeholder and lead to the development of mutually acceptable approaches to measurement, which acknowledged both strengths and weaknesses among providers. It also provided a method of comparing and contrasting provision across centres, which is stakeholder owned, and which highlighted relevant quality issues in local communities. In so doing, it generated examples of practice that might be disseminated to other groups. Despite the limitations reported, the groups who piloted the framework found it possible to apply the model and reported positive outcomes and ways of improving practice in the future.

Literacy learning which takes place in local communities would seem to provide an alternative means for overcoming many of the barriers which adult learner's experience and which present them from participating in existing provision. For a variety of reasons, community learning provides alternative ways for adults who might not otherwise participate in formal provision to learn. It can develop a sense of self worth, by valuing people's own experience, and by helping adults make use of this experience to understand their situation and the world about them. It may therefore hold the key to promoting wider participation and success in ABE. It would also seem to have much to offer in providing an experimental base for testing out new ways of learning for those who are unlikely to participate in formal provision. Community approaches imply a different kind of learning from that obtained in the traditional education system. Central to the concept is the notion democratic control that engages the learner in making decisions about what is to be learned. What is learned is negotiated and negotiable. As it is empowering and values life experience it is therefore likely to appeal to new cohorts of adult learners.

Much of the thinking about community learning is based on the ideals of Paulo Freire outlined earlier. This emphasises the notion of powerlessness of the individual and the need to encourage social action that will promote change. An important principle of Freire's thinking is self-directed learning. Learners should be encouraged to decide on the topics and themes that they want to find out more about. These are often issues, which are very important to a community, and which are constantly spoken about with much expression of emotion. For example poor access to health care, shortage of money, crime, etc; The sense of a common predicament is central to his ideas about empowerment and the development of critical consciousness. Learners can discuss issues relevant to them and begin to develop a better understanding of their problems and their causes and they subsequently become motivated to change their situation.

Developing ABE provision around literacy skills such as the skills to speak about and act upon issues encourages learners to take part in socially valuable learning at every stage of the learning process. The creation of role models from the community offers perhaps great potential for influencing others, for breaking down the *dispositional* barriers referred to in *chapter 3*, and for bringing about change. Since adult education and community action lead to more democratic processes developing in the identification and meeting of needs within communities, it might be argued that the democratic model for evaluating quality, developed in this study, has a particular relevance to community based ABE. The emphasis on local involvement, the sharing of control, and promoting solidarity and collaboration, which lead to a bottom up approach to solving the problems of participation and success in adult education are ones which the community educator can identify with easily. The framework developed in the research allows for democratic control. It does not have to be based on a notion of comparability or measurement between centres. Collective experience and action work is another domain of ABE, which requires to be evaluated. The comprehensiveness and flexibility of the quality framework developed in this research means that it is possible to apply it in very different learning situations. The involvement of a wide range of community groups in its formulation indicates that the framework and process has legitimacy within an evolving community sector and its fine-tuning to meet specific needs should be possible. This approach offers real opportunities to open up new forms of ABE, which will

enable new groups to benefit from ABE, and in this context a community approach could be said to hold the key to widening participation in ABE.

6.12 Literacy and the quality debate

The research study has also raised issues about our understanding of ABE and how it influences the way we think about quality and participation. This study has shown that definitions of ABE are constantly changing in tandem with developments in language, technologies and social organisation. Although ABE is often thought of as a set of skills, it also involves a range of capabilities involving knowledge and understanding.

Different ideologies of ABE influence the ABE curriculum in different ways, and also influences how we organise and manage provision. It also influences how we think about evaluation and the kind of questions we ask about evaluation and in measuring success. For example, a quality model, designed to evaluate technical competence in the formal sector, may be inappropriate for assessing a model of ABE that is community located and based on social action. There would therefore seem to be a paradox in talking about blueprints for assessing quality in ABE that can be applied across the board. Quality models for ABE should not be influenced by any one particular ideology to the exclusion of others. The strength of the model developed in this research is that it has proven that it can be applied successfully in different contexts and may as such hold the key to the development of an inclusive model that acknowledges diversity and differences in ideology in ABE.

We have seen that existing models for evaluating success in ABE are based on dominant ideologies, which emphasise the acquisition of technical skills and qualifications for work. In this model the skills needed are clearly defined and the learner may have little to contribute to defining knowledge or skills. S/he simply is involved in making choices about what skills are to be learnt at a particular time. The skills are legitimised by those who make decisions on policy and tutors and organisers role is often to ensure that such skills are acquired successfully. Other learning that promotes citizenship, social cohesion or diversity, is often not seen as important or only secondary to the *hard skills* of reading, writing, information technology etc.

A focus on skill acquisition has also led to the development of methods of evaluation, which are narrowly focused. The consensus model developed in this research, which can challenge dominant assumptions about ABE, may therefore be unacceptable to those who want to prescribe a skills approach such as that described above. Ideologies of ABE and methods of measuring success are not simply dependent on agreement among educators, but are part of a much wider political debate about the democratisation of education. Evaluating the success of what is offered is closely linked to social and political objectives or ideologies, which influence decisions on policy and practice in ABE. Policy makers and bureaucrats are charged with reinforcing dominant assumptions about practice and develop quality or evaluation models to which are in sympathy to widely held views. Without the political will to broaden the base of ABE it becomes difficult if not impossible to change things and to develop new and innovative strategies for widening participation and measuring success. The result is that while some adults who are attracted to existing provision benefit, many other are excluded because provision has nothing to offer them. Sometimes adults are required to participate to provide access to unemployment benefits. Where this happens, often it leads to alienation and disaffection.

In what is sometimes described as a hopeless situation, an ideology of emancipatory literacy has grown up. This involves a radical critique of elite culture, state-controlled curricula and unequal power relations between groups. This emancipatory discourse although marginal, is having some impact on practice and is widening participation among traditionally excluded groups. People in local communities often see their lives rather differently to those who control the resources. People want to be able to go about their everyday lives and to improve its quality, but the skills and knowledge they feel they need, are very different to those defined by educationalists or politicians who make decisions about what they should learn. Crowther and Tett (98:35) argue that ABE should be more about a genuine dialogue between tutors and learners, but for this to happen dominant assumptions informing literacy practice need to be opened up and challenged. The central question would seem to be who should decide what adults should learn? Is it the responsibility of governments, politicians, bureaucrats or educators? What kind of say should learners have in their future? These question go to the very heart of democracy and the rights of individuals and communities to determine their own futures.

In the short term, the answer lies in how far current political ideologies influencing the development of ABE are prepared to allow the social practices of excluded adults to influence ABE. If the rights of individuals and communities to determining their own learning is accepted, then the notion of empowering learners and communities to take control of their learning and to shape pedagogic processes can be incorporated into policies and practices in ABE.

Recent research in ABE suggests we need to think about how we redefine ABE and the contexts in which learning may take place and this has implications for how we think about quality. We have seen how research suggests we need to broaden our understanding of ABE. These new pedagogic considerations may have an important contribution to make to how we develop ABE in the 21st century and how we measure its success. The *New Literacy Studies* reported by Hamilton (00:1), involves us in looking beyond educational settings to vernacular practices and informal learning.³ ABE is seen not simply as set of skills, but rather as many different literacies which exist in practice. This then begins to place people's own definitions of literacy or ABE at the centre of things.

However, despite the evidence of the need to think beyond traditional notions of ABE, policies are influencing practices towards standardisation of curricula and testing as part of national curricula. There is therefore a need to pay attention to the institutional processes and the intersection between policy and learning theory and how this influences practices.⁴ The emergence of a new way of looking at literacy will inevitably lead to new ways of organising ABE practice. To encourage and promote a new understanding, new tools for measuring success and new ways of engaging with adults will be required. The research in *chapter 5*, describes a method and a tool, which can engage stakeholders in ABE in a debate about ABE and how literacy should be organised and delivered. It is merely a starting point for engaging everyone in the debate about how to develop a new understanding and how to improve practices. Solutions will depend on the will of the stakeholders to listen and to take action to change things.

If *vernacular literacies* are to influence the dominant way of thinking about literacy, those concerned with defining policy for ABE and lifelong learning must begin to develop links between theoretical insights and public policy on ABE. Hamilton (00:8) argues that the research approach offered by the *New Literacy Studies* provides a framework from which to develop a new response to literacy. A social practice approach to literacy, she says, demonstrates the changing demands that people experience at different stages of their lives, and offers convincing evidence of the need for lifelong learning systems which people can access at critical points. A lifelong learning strategy for ABE can be driven by the needs of institutions or it can genuinely sustain and develop the resources, process and purposes that already exist in civic life. There are many pressures that push ABE policy toward the institutional notion.

The debate about *vernacular* and *institutional literacies* is also relevant to the debate about quality in ABE. The potential for valuing and promoting *vernacular literacies* in local communities is very great and provides a challenge to our understanding of how we encourage learning in ABE and how we measure participation and success. If we accept the value of vernacular learning, then this has implications for practice: viz for funding, in providing learning spaces in the community, in strengthening access points for learning such as libraries, cyber cafes, advice centres etc. Ways of learning, learner-tutor relationships etc; are very different between formal and non-formal learning environments, and require different approaches to assessment and evaluation. All this has implications for how we measure access and participation and the quality of what we do. Stakeholders in non-formal learning will have a crucial role to play in assessing successful learning and determining agreed measures or benchmarks for assessing participation and success that can be applied in different learning contexts. This research, based on agreed aspirations of stakeholders, may provide a starting point. As much of the expertise for promoting *vernacular literacies* resides within local community, their role will be crucial in developing and promoting measures to assess participation and success.

6.13 Challenging issues of language and culture

Ideologies of culture and language within a dominant society are also increasingly affecting concepts of ABE. For example, the influence of dialect and other non-standard forms of speech raise issues about acknowledging the diversity of language. To succeed has meant to be assimilated into the dominant culture that may involve a rejection of language, family, and community thus serving to reinforce further the cultural politics of domination and subordination. The wider cultural politics of

class and nation are noticeably absent from the debate about ABE in Northern Ireland. The dominant cultural view of what language and literacy is predominates, and controversies about acknowledging different forms of language and culture were not raised in the quality study in Northern Ireland. While there is evidence of a desire to accept cultural difference, issues of local language, dialect, culture etc; were not seen as important. Perhaps this is because of the acceptance of a functional model for ABE that is skills based and which does not take issues of culture and language into account. Once again, the strength of this research, is that because it is stakeholder led, it can accommodate culture and language differences, should they arise.

Crowther and Tett (98:36) acknowledge the need for a wider debate on issues of culture and language. They say:

'Culture and language are embedded in each other and in the relations of power. Powerful cultures are in competition with subordinate ones. This debate is an important socio-linguistic issue and at the same time the solution to this question is part of a wider debate about what is literacy and what is not- Does an adult have to speak or write in the dominant culture in order to be literate? Can an adult be described as literate if he communicates?'

The development of community-led programmes which encourage attention to the real life contexts where literacies are located, may lead to a demand for change. Dominant views about ABE pervade thinking in all sectors of provision in Northern Ireland, and this was reflected in the kind of framework, which emerged. The debate about different ideologies of literacy does not seem to have gathered momentum among educators. Dominant views, as contained in government reports, have been accepted without question. The current context of democratic renewal in Northern Ireland may provide a sounding board for raising questions about the meanings and contexts of ABE and how to engage more adults in provision. It may also lead to a shift in understanding of ABE from a *functional or technical skills model* to embracing an approach, which prioritises *critical thinking and social action*. As critical literacy draws on the wider curriculum, which includes new political, social and community structures, the result of the peace process may be to draw communities into a more critical discussion, which will assist adult learners to understand issues such as the socio-political context or the local environment in a way which enables them to improve their literacy skills, in more congenial non-formal learning contexts. The impetus for re-examining cultural identities in Northern Ireland may also be a factor in encouraging adults to engage critically in appropriating dominant literacies. This could include the recognition of cultural traditions of being Irish, British and European and reclaiming of life histories and the everyday experiences of ordinary people. This new cultural space, which the process of democratic renewal signals, provides the opportunity to recognise and validate new ways of learning.

The dominant emphasis on ABE as *culturally neutral* has perhaps underestimated its contribution to encouraging critical thinking and social action. Critical literacy can be explored through *dominant and vernacular literacies* and requires building a critical curriculum. Critical thinking includes the ability to go beyond the surface of experience and its representation in order to identify social interests and where necessary to act on them. ABE is deeply and inescapably bound up with producing, reproducing and maintaining unequal arrangements of power. The meanings that are given and received in texts are not innocent. Developing critical readers and writers has to be about enabling learners to handle the inherently ideological dimension of ABE, and the role of literacy in the enactment and production of power. One consequence of democratic renewal might be a greater interest in producing writings of learners.

An emphasis on critical approaches to ABE did not figure in the framework. This reflects the emphasis on vocational and skills approaches to literacy, which does not encourage a critical curriculum, which facilitates wider participation in democratic society. Provision in the future may encompass a broader curriculum. As well as learning the technical skills of reading and writing, adults can at the same time be engaging in critical learning that enables them to draw from traditional disciplines such as psychology, philosophy, democracy, racism etc;

The need for new thinking in literacy practice has never been clearer. The involvement of all the stakeholders in a dialogue about what ABE should be, offers the best opportunity to raise such a debate.

6.14 New contexts for ABE

Recently, literacy has become inextricably linked to a wider debate about what kind of society we want to create and our vision for learning within that society. This debate is fraught with many questions and controversies and there are differences emerging at national, local and international level. What is clear is that our vision and hopes for lifelong learning are likely to have an impact on how we define ABE, and how we measure participation and success.

The most recent attempt to draw consensus on the aims and goals of this new approach is the *Memorandum on Lifelong Learning of the Commission of the European Communities (2000)*. The memorandum mentions the shift in thinking that has taken place on lifelong learning in the 1990's. It notes the twin aims of maintaining economic competitiveness and employability and combating social exclusion as being equally important. The paper is important because it posits a new way of thinking, which if implemented, will significantly change our practices in lifelong learning. This will have implications for how we think about ABE and how we measure its success. The memorandum notes that:

'Lifelong Learning is no longer just one aspect of education and training; it must become the guiding principle for provision and participation across the full continuum of learning contexts. The coming decade must see the implementation of this vision. All those living in Europe, without exception, should have equal opportunities to adjust to the demands of social and economic change to participate actively in the shaping of Europe's future.' (00:3)

One of the key messages of the paper is the need for *new basic skills* for all, which access learning for sustained participation in the knowledge society. Basic Skills are seen as crucial for everyone at the beginning of a continuum of learning throughout life. The memorandum defines the new basic skills, as those required for active participation in the knowledge society and economy –i.e. skills for the labour market and at work, in real and virtual communities, and for living in a democracy. This broader strategy of lifelong learning perhaps promises a different vision of what literacy might be and a vision that is much closer, potentially to the new understandings embodied in the *New Literacy Studies (2000)*, described earlier. The report also acknowledges the need for *'high quality basic education for all'* (00:7) to equip people with the basic skills required in a knowledge-based economy.

The memorandum proposes a new interpretation of what ABE should be in a post-industrial society. This may lead to a redefining of the curriculum and the development of new ways of reaching out to learners. In a period of unprecedented technological and global change, it is hardly surprising that educators are debating new interpretations and directions in ABE. As ABE becomes more centre stage and part of a lifelong learning strategy, it is important that it does not marginalise even further those adults whose needs are most difficult to meet. What is important is that we do not develop concepts or systems that exclude individuals or groups. Experience shows that there are large numbers of people for whom participation in education is a long way off. The idea that we can develop a blueprint for implementing lifelong learning and systematic benchmarks to measure success, seem to be a long way off. The strength of an evolving framework for ABE is that it enables groups of providers and learners to reflect and evaluate their progress and to set goals for improvement at a realistic pace. We must therefore guard against standardisation of curricula and of evaluation, as a way of increasing participation and success. Methods of increasing participation and improving quality of provision must be sensitive to local circumstances and local communities must play a key role in bringing about change.

6.15 Concluding Remarks

This study is offered as a contribution to the educational debate about participation and success in ABE. It demonstrates that participation and success are dependant on a range of factors which educators, managers, policy makers, and all those concerned with ABE must take account of. The research has developed and tested a quality framework for measuring success in literacy. The framework is perhaps unique, in that it seeks to take account of the view of a variety of stakeholders from ABE and could be described as a *bottom up model* for assessing quality of provision, which has been determined by the views of providers and participants. Perhaps the next step should be the development of external systems of measuring quality, which seeks to determine overall objectives and goals and to determine common standards for provision. An external framework would complement

internal approaches, providing direction for developing internal measurements, which are locally defined. However it must also be developed in such a way that it does not undermine local involvement.

The framework developed in this research represents a step forward in moving towards a more inclusive approach to widening participation and improving success for individuals and groups in ABE. What ABE is and what it is trying to achieve, is all the time changing. Our understanding is constantly being challenged by the complex and dynamic society in which we live. Just as the goal posts of literacy are always changing, so too are the ways for measuring participation and success. There will therefore always be a need to review and update approaches, and to develop new tools for measurement.

One of the problems in creating change is a lack of research in ABE, which can inform policy and practice. Hamilton (01:12) refers to the dearth of research opportunities in literacy that she attributes in part to our failure to work with practitioners in creating a broad evidence base. As a result, she says, we have had to fall back on educational research and theory developed for children to explain adult practices. However, there is now a growing body of work on literacy that is internationally recognised, some of which has been used to inform this study. Such research provides an effective source of information on which to build. What is clear is that ABE is at the beginning of a new and exciting era, and a healthy debate about how to widen access and ensure quality, flexibility and responsiveness of provision has begun. Speaking of the need to develop new forms of research in adult basic education Hamilton concludes (01:14):

'We have inherited inappropriate models of research and weak models of what literacy means to learners. I want to see research that is accountable and that genuinely contributes to change in the field, research that is genuinely embedded in the experience of learners and teachers and is shaped by them.'

A problem cited with participatory research is that it cannot flourish in learning situations where there is no real exchange between learners and teachers. This was not true of this study, where there was a lot of evidence of interchange of ideas between learners and teachers. For the participatory research approach to take hold, this implies a change of relationship in the field and a commitment from policy-makers to the principle of mutual accountability which acknowledges that information flow is both ways and from the bottom up as well as the top down.

'It implies a willingness to respond to the complexity and diversity of learning in adult basic education, to trust adults' (both learners and practitioners) accounts of their situation and to respect these within research accounts' (01:14)

This research study, grounded in participatory evaluation, is based on practices which acknowledge the contribution which the practitioner, learner and other interested groups can make in the field of literacy towards the development of innovative practices which can improve quality and participation. It also provides challenges to the traditional methodologies we have used to gather information, and from which we have developed our ideas.

Engaging in quality learning across the life-span is becoming part of our life experience. To ensure participation and success for adults with basic education needs requires quality-learning experiences, which respect difference and diversity. This provides a challenge to ensure routes are provided into education for those on the margins. The development of such opportunities will, I believe, be an essential ingredient to ensuring a future for adult basic education in the new millennium.

¹ The results of this research reported in the National Institute for Literacy's *'Equipped for the Future'* report (2000) seeks to understand what is needed to meet national goals for adult literacy and lifelong learning. The framework and standards represent the results of six years of effort to create a working consensus on what the goals of teaching and learning are seen as important tools for building a strong customer-driven educational system, that aligns its resources with achieving its stated goals. The results are based on analysis of what adults did in their roles and workers, citizens, and members of families and communities. They are refined through an iterative process of feedback, comment and

testing which included learner involvement. As a result the standards reflect a broad and inclusive consensus on what is important for adults to know and do to be maximally effective in their daily lives.

² These issues were reported in *chapter 3*, in the *Making Belfast Work Study* (1997). For example, the chapter highlights issues such as excellence in management, effective guidance etc; These issues were also identified by the stakeholders quality model reported in *chapter 5*. These two participation studies, together with the quality study, reported a number of similar findings about how provision might be developed to encourage wider participation. This would suggest that the issues are clear to managers and practitioners.

³ The *New Literacy Studies* are reported in *Local Literacies* Barton and Hamilton, (1998) The project has been a detailed study of the role of literacy in the everyday lives of people in Lancaster, England. The study used in-depth interviews, complemented by observations, photography and the collection of documents and records. It included a door-to-door survey in one neighbourhood of Lancaster and detailed case studies of people in twelve households in the neighbourhood, observing particular literacy events, and asking people to reflect on their practices. Alongside the case studies were thirty interviews of people in what were called access points for literacy, such as bookshops, libraries and advice centres. There were also interviews of twenty adults who had identified problems with their reading and writing and had been attending courses at the local adult college.

⁴ *Falk and Harrison* (98:613) refers to processes whereby knowledge is circulated within a community as *social capital* or 'networks, norms and trust that facilitate co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit.' From their research with community-based groups in Australia, they have begun to identify the informal processes whereby knowledge is created and circulated. These include organising forums for discussion of issues, working collectively in groups, encouraging wide participation among community members, including volunteers, making routes for people to develop and move into new positions, *passing the torch on* to subsequent generations of activists, dividing tasks up into short, recognisable and achievable goals and stages and making results of activities publicly visible and celebrated.

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American Association for Lifelong Learning	http://www.ncl.org/anr/partners/aaace.htm
AONTAS-Irish Adult Education Association	http://www.aontas.com
Arts Council of Northern Ireland	www.artscouncil-ni.org
*Basic Skill Agency Resource Centre	http://www.basic-skills.co.uk
British Broadcasting Corporation, (BBC) Ireland	www.bbc.co.uk/ni
British Broadcasting Corporation. (BBC Online Education)	http://www.bbc.co.uk/education/home/
Better Government for Older People	http://www.bettergovernmentforolderpeople.gov.uk/
British Association of Open Learning: Quality Mark	http://www.baol.co.uk/qmwhy.htm
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Department for Education & Employment. (DfEE)	http://www.dfee.gov.uk/
Department of Further and Higher Education for Northern Ireland	http://www.deni.gov.uk/
DfEE Learning Cities	http://www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/learningcities/index.htm
Educational Guidance Service for Adults in Northern Ireland	www.egsa.org.uk
Equal Opportunities Commission	http://www.eoc.org.uk/
European Basic Skills Network	http://www.eurobasicskills.org
European Commission	http://europa.eu.int/comm/
European Commission Staff Working Paper - A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning	http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/life/memoen.pdf

*Festival of lifelong learning ,Supporting Lifelong Learning Global Colloquium	http://www.uel.ac.uk/lifeong/rfestival/docs/archive/lines.htm
Further Education National Training Organisation, (FENTO)	http://www.fento.org/fento_a.html
Further Education Planning (FEP) Curriculum Development Unitisation project 1999/2000	http://www.nei.ac.uk/unitisation/
Kennedy Report, Government response	http://www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/kennedy/kennedy.pdf
INFED-Lifelong Learning	http://www.infed.org/lifelonglearning/b-life.htm
Informal Education	http://www.infed.org/lifelonglearning/b-life.htm
Liberal Adult Education in Sweden	http://www.folkbildning.se/
Literacy and Community Education	http://www.scotland.gov.uk/scotlit/paper1.htm
National Adult Learning Survey	http://www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/greenpaper/ch8006.htm
National Adult Literacy Agency, Ireland	http://www.nala.ie/
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National Literacy Summit 2000	http://www.nifl.gov/nifl/summit/agenda.html
*National Literacy Trust	http://www.literacytrust.org.uk
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North Carolina Research and Education Network	http://www.ncren.nrt/
Northern Ireland Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme	www.nicats.ac.uk
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Learning Age : A renaissance for a New Britain	http://www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/greenpaper/index.htm
Open University Lifelong Learning	www.open.ac.uk/lifelong-learning/papers/index.html
*Scottish Community Development Centre	http://www.scdc.org.uk/nessup/hand.htm

Swedish High Schools	http://www.fin.fhsk.se/engelska.htm
Times Educational Supplement	http://www.tes.co.uk/
Ulster Television	www.utvlive.com
UN Human Development Report	www.undp.org
United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organisation. (UNESCO)	www.unesco.org
University for Industry	www.ufiltld.co.uk
Women Online Worldwide	http://www.wowwomen.com/
Workers Education Association , (WEA) Northern Ireland	www.wea-nio.com
Workforce Literacy	http://www.ca/litand/employ/web.htm
World-woman	http://www.worldwoman.net

ANNEX 1: *Examples of Quality Management Models.*

The following are examples of quality management models, which were examined in *phase 1*. Each model has been applied to educational environments. The approach to developing and or implementing quality in ABE in this study has some similarities with these models, particularly with TQM.

i) *The Total Quality Management (TQM) model*

The *Total Quality Management model* puts emphasis on particular aspects and is therefore more a catalyst of existing trends and tendencies, than a precise catalogue of methods and prescriptions. The TQM model has a clear customer focus, which promotes continuous improvement. Quality is never ending and requires the development of an organisational culture in which people are committed to continuous improvement. It requires an understanding and ability to control the processes. It requires an integrated approach to the product, which sees quality as everyone's job and the organisational goal requires the participation of everyone. It requires teamwork, leadership and commitment, to build a strong consensus about quality. It is based on systematic problem-solving using appropriate tools and methods for identifying weaknesses and areas for improvement, analysing them tracing the sources of the problems, seeking improvement and finally implementing them. Data gathering and analysis are particularly important as a basis for discussions and decisions.

The adoption of modern quality methods, in particular the application of '*Total Quality Management*' (TQM) principles in education and training is nevertheless problematic. A major problem is the interpretation of TQM terminology and concepts in the education and training environment. Crucial to the adoption of TQM, is a good understanding of what the products of the organisation are. There can be no doubt that the overall outcomes of education or training provision are the competence improvement of the students. Competence is a notion that encompasses knowledge, skills and attitudes. The improvement can mean both a broadening and a deepening of the competence, in short the added value derived from attending classes or studying learning materials. These competencies are dependent on a series of products in education, which include setting of course objectives, design and development of course materials, provision of an appropriate learning environment, the provision of other services such as guidance, child care etc;

Meeting customers' expectations is considered to be the cornerstone of a TQM approach, and this is also applicable in the education and training context. The difficulty is defining who the customers are and how their needs may be met. There could be said to be many types of customers in education. There are the direct beneficiaries of services, usually the students themselves. There are also indirect beneficiaries or other people affected by and with an interest in the learning process achieved (e.g. the employers). Another important group of customers might be the receiving institutions of those who are completing courses or the people responsible for the next learning stage. Those who pay for education may also be said to be a group of customers of education and training. In the case of publicly financed education, it can be argued that society as a whole are the customers requiring educated citizens to support the democratic and economic system. In this case it is likely to be public authorities who set quality standards. In ABE this might be the employer, the individual or the public authority. All these customers have different quality perceptions of education and training with different weighting on quality factors. For example, small class size may be a factor for students, but may be seen as a sign of inefficiency by public authorities.

Education providers have therefore several challenges in relation to customers and they must review the totality of customer services, not just the educational ones, if they want to establish total quality management.

Products and customers could be said to be the most important quality concepts, which need interpretation in the education and training context. These need to be defined and agreed upon. Fundamental to quality management thinking is the recognition that the quality of the end product depends on the quality of all successive processes and their interaction.

Figure 1 Continuous Quality Improvement in Education

For student learning:

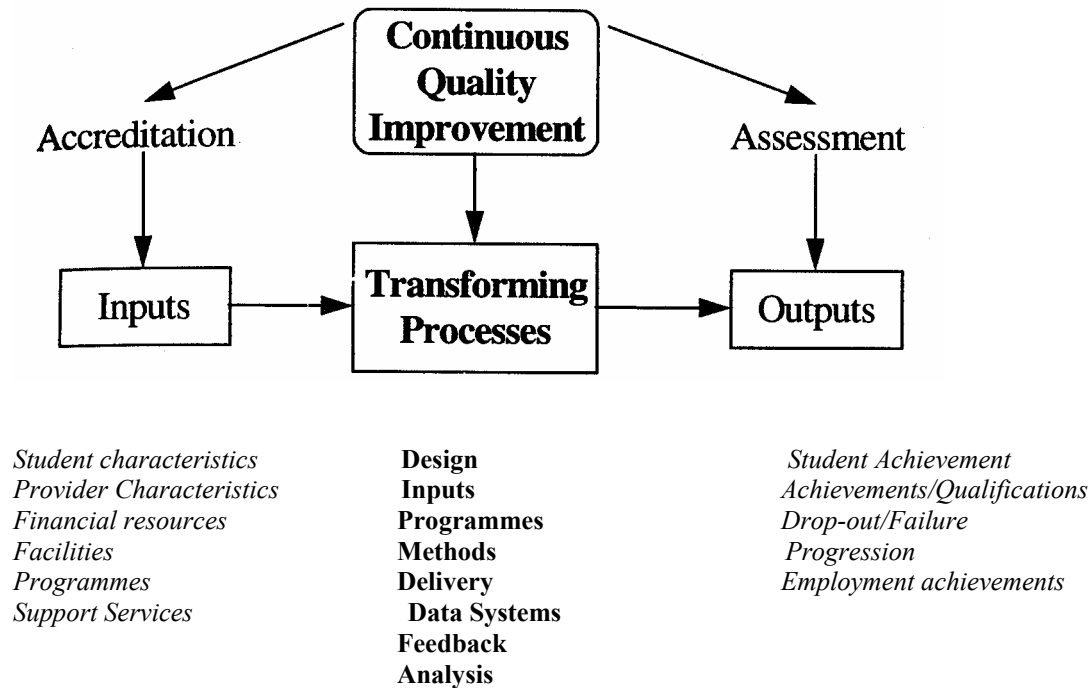


Figure 1 presents an open systems model, for the core functions of student learning. Traditionally approaches to assuring quality in education focussed on accreditation and outcomes assessment. Accreditation focussed on the inputs of the institution, such as student achievement, support facilities available etc; The basic assumption of this approach is that if high quality inputs exist, high quality outputs will result. This approach provides data on what goes into the system, but very little data on what happens in the system and what comes out of it. Dissatisfaction with the focus on inputs has led to the emergence of the outcome assessment movement, which emphasised the importance of evaluating the outputs of education such as student achievement, qualifications and employment. Unfortunately the knowledge of educational outputs alone does not provide a basis for determining problems in the teaching and learning process. The open systems approach of TQM provides a means for developing an integrated quality assurance system. It emphasises the need for quality at all three stages – inputs, transforming processes, and outputs.

ii) **The International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) model**

The *International Organisation for Standardisation* model (ISO) is a major international standards organisation which issues the ISO 9000 awards for standards in quality management. The international norms are a set of quality systems standards, which allow certification by an independent certifying body. These quality standards consist essentially of a number of management principles expressed in production terminology. The ISO 9000 norms can be considered as generalised specifications for quality assurance in a production environment.

Applying ISO 9000 to education and training organisations is somewhat problematical. Although the philosophy behind the norms is clear, its interpretation outside its original context is not always straightforward and thus not always applied consistently. A strong emphasis is put on organisation, which most education and training providers are. The costs, time and paperwork initially involved in the formal adoption of ISO9000 procedures often present insurmountable barriers for small

organisations. There is an *added value* that can result from certification. Many education institutions have been successful in obtaining certification and for those operating in a competitive market, the image improvement and enhanced reputation through the symbolic value are probably most significant. Experiences have also shown that the process may generate additional benefits such as teamwork and internal co-operation, create a new understanding about quality, bring management concepts into the education environment, facilitate early detection and correction of problems, be complimentary to other quality control procedures, and encompass course design and development.

It is also claimed that ISO has many defects in an education environment. Education cannot easily be reduced to a pass/fail system. ISO also pays insufficient attention to setting initial standards, has limited concern for the specificity of the educational products and service and does not really integrate customer feedback. It is also argued that it creates a bureaucracy focussing on procedures, records and control and is relatively expensive.

In summary, ISO can provide a framework and focus for quality efforts of education and training organisations. It can enhance their image in an increasingly competitive education environment and provide a system of external validation.

iii) *The Investors in People model.*

This is the national standard for effective investment in people. The standard was developed in 1990 in collaboration with leading businesses, employees and training organisations. The standard sets a level of good practice for improving an organisation's performance through its people. It offers the framework for integrating people strategy with business strategy. Many organisations in Northern Ireland are funded through DHFETE for implementing these standards using NVQ's as a tool to train the employed to promote occupational competence within the workplace, which if implemented correctly should transfer business, benefits to the organisation. The main benefits of *Investors in People* are as follows – enhancing organisational performance by acquiring a competitive edge; developing new frameworks for managing people to secure flexibility and profitability; aligning business and human resources planning and operations practices more closely; benchmarking training and development practices more effectively; and enhancing corporate image to customers.

The Northern Ireland policy document *Lifelong learning: a New Learning Culture for All (1999)* promotes the IiP standard as a means for organisations to achieve their educational aims:

'Investors in People (IiP) is the national standard of good practice in human resource development. It provides a framework against which employers can benchmark the effectiveness of their organisation's human resources policies and practices.'

iv) *Quality Awards*

In the 90s *Quality Awards* have also got much praise as a framework for assessing the quality of an organisation. The *Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award* is one such award established in 1987 in the USA as a result of similar successes in Japan. This award has education criteria based on core values, concepts and a framework for education organisations. Another such award is the European Quality Award introduced by the *European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM)* in 1992. This award is very similar to the Baldrige award. The Model tells us that customer satisfaction, people satisfaction, and impact of society are achieved through leadership which drives the policy and strategy, people management, resources and processes, leading to excellence in business results.

ANNEX 2-Groups and Organisations Consulted in the North of Ireland: Phase 1 & 2 (1998-2000).

The following is a list of the groups and organisations who participated in the 'Evolving Quality Framework Study' (1998-2000). I am very grateful to a great many individuals who participated in consultation, attended meetings and/or provided written submission during the two phases of the project. -

Groups and individuals consulted in Phase 1:

Adult Basic Education Support Service, Belfast.
Adult Literacy and Basic Education Committee
Advanced Learning Systems, Belfast.
Armagh College of Further Education
Ballybeen Women's Centre, Belfast.
Basic Skills Resource Centre, Belfast.
Foyer, Belfast.
The Unemployed Centre, Belfast.
Causeway Institute of Further and Higher Education, Coleraine.
Community Education Course Students, Queen's University at Armagh.
Community Work Education and Training Network.
Customised Training Services Ltd, Londonderry.
Dairy Farm Jobskills, Belfast
Adult Literacy Scheme, Donegal Town.
Open Learning Centre, East Belfast.
Education Guidance Service for Adults, Belfast.
Gate Programme, Londonderry.
Greencastle Adult Literacy Scheme, Co.Donegal.
H M Inspectorate (DENI).
Lifelong Learning, Cookstown.
Limavady College of Further Education.
Women's Group, Magherafelt.
Training Organisation, Londonderry.
North East Institute of Further and Higher Education
North West Institute of Further and Higher Education, Londonderry.
Towards 2000, Skill NI.
Spring Community Group, Armagh.
Taughmonagh Community Forum, Belfast
Training and Employment Agency, Belfast.
Upper Springfield Development Trust, Belfast.
Verbal Arts Centre, Londonderry.
Women's Opportunities Step by Step, Magherafelt.
Women's Second Chance Education Project, Letterkenny.
Workers Educational Association, Northern Ireland.

Groups and individuals consulted in Phase 2:

Adult Education Officer, VEC, Letterkenny, Co Donegal
Adult Literacy Organiser, Greencastle, Co Donegal
Basic Skills Unit Development Workers
Crana College, Buncrana, Co Donegal
Customised Training Services, Open Learning Centre, Waterside, Londonderry
DERRYBYTES, Bishop Street, Londonderry
Derry Youth and Community Workshop, Society St, Londonderry
Desertmartin Development Association, Desertmartin, Co Londonderry
East Antrim Institute of Further and Higher Education
East Down Institute of Further and Higher Education
Education Co-ordinator, Inishowen Partnership Company, Buncrana, Co Donegal
Fermanagh Training, Enniskillen
Foyer, University Rd, Belfast
GATE Programme, The Women's Centre, Londonderry
Gortnaghy Community Partnership, Dungiven, Co Londonderry.
Hugh J O'Boyle, Downpatrick
Inishowen Rural Development Ltd, Pound St, Carndonagh, Co Donegal
Maydown and Ebrington Training, Ebrington Business Centre, Londonderry
Students from the Master of Social Science (MSSc) programme in Lifelong Learning students, Queen's University, Belfast (1999-2001)
North Down and Ards Institute of Further and Higher Education
North West Institute of Further and Higher Education, Limavady Road, Londonderry
Reading and Writing Scheme, Co Donegal
Upper Springfield Development Trust
Verbal Arts Centre, Londonderry
Women's Opportunities Step by Step, Magherafelt
Workers Educational Association
Young Help Trust, Waring St, Belfast
Youthreach, Buncrana Co Donegal

ANNEX 3: A Quality Framework for Adult Basic Education.

The following is a summary of findings from *Phase 1*. It includes the elements of a quality framework for ABE, identified by stakeholders in the ‘*Evolving Quality Framework Study*’ (1998-1999). These findings were later published as a *Workbook – ‘Evolving Quality Framework for Adult Basic Education’* which supported local evaluation teams in *Phase 2* of the research.

Guiding Principles

There are five guiding principles, each of which encapsulates a central value of ABE. Each guiding Principle is followed by questions for discussion.

- i) **An ethical code of confidentiality, respect and trust will inform all aspects of the organisation.**

Evaluation Criteria

What does this principle mean for your provision?

How might confidentiality be defined?

Should all members of the organisation –learners, tutors, organisers and managers – be trained according to an agreed code of practice?

- ii) **Cultural differences will be respected at all levels of the organisation.**

Evaluation Criteria

What does this principle mean for your provision?

How might you ensure that those from different social and cultural backgrounds feel fully included in the life and activities of the centre?

Could all members of the organisation – learners, tutors, organisers and managers –come together to explore and learn about specific examples of cultural difference?

- iii) **The student’s right to attend on a voluntary basis and to choose his/her own goals will be protected by the organisation.**

Evaluation Criteria

What does this principle mean for your provision?

What might threaten the principle of voluntary attendance?

How might learners feel pressurised when it comes to setting goals?

- iv) **Particular attention will be paid to creating and maintaining an atmosphere of social interaction, informality and enjoyment within the organisation.**

Evaluation Criteria

What does this principle mean for your provision?

What might threaten an interactive, informal atmosphere?

- v) **Students will be enabled to participate in all aspects of the organisation, including evaluation of the scheme/centre.**

Evaluation Criteria

What does this principle mean for your provision?

How might you ensure that learners together with tutors, organisers and managers share in a sense ownership of the provision?

Quality Statements

There are 16 quality statements. The first 6 *statements are about the student experience* of ABE and the last 10 *are about programme issues*.

Student Experience Elements

Quality Statement 1

Welcome/Initial Contact

A quality programme will:

- a. Listen to the student in order to negotiate a starting point for his/her learning based on his/her needs.
- b. Share information with the learners about how the scheme/centre works.

Evaluation Criteria (*informed by guiding principles 1 & 2*)

In what ways does the scheme ensure that:

- An initial individual interview is carried out according to an ethical code of confidentiality and respect?
- Negotiating the starting point for the learning takes account of the learner's background, gender and culture?

Quality Statement 2

Student-Tutor Relationship

A quality programme will:

- a. Recognise that the learner-tutor relationship is based on mutual respect, trust and collaboration.
- b. Respect the adult status of the learners.
- c. Understand that both student and tutor contribute to and learn from the tuition process.

Evaluation Criteria (*informed by guiding principles 1, 2, 3 & 4*)

In what ways does the scheme ensure that:

- Tutors understand and practice a code of confidentiality, respect and trust?
- Tutors respect and understand the culture of the learner?
- Tutors have the qualities to facilitate learning in an atmosphere of warmth, enjoyment and social interaction?
- Learner's goals, needs and interests remain at the centre of the learning process?
- Learners are encouraged to play an active role in directing and evaluating their own learning?

Quality Statement 3

Individual and Group Tuition

A quality programme will:

- a. Provide one-to-one, small group and larger tuition.
- b. Enable learners to choose and move between these forms of provision according to their needs.

Evaluation Criteria (*informed by guiding principle 4*)

In what ways does the scheme ensure that:

- Students are made aware of the tuition options available to them and of the appropriateness of each of these options to their needs?
- The choice between one-to-one and group tuition is available to all learners?

Quality Statement 4

Range of Tuition Options

A quality programme will provide a maximum choice for learners in terms of the nature, location and time-tabling of learning opportunities.

Evaluation Criteria *(informed by guiding principles 2, 3, 4 & 5)*

In what ways does the scheme ensure that:

- Learners have access to learning opportunities at a variety of times and locations?
- Learners have respect to learning opportunities that respect their preferences in terms of pace, tuition style, group size and group composition?
- Learners are enabled to participate in decisions about group composition, content, tuition style, time-tabling and location of learning opportunities?

Quality Statement 5

Student Assessment

A quality programme will:

- a. Assess the students needs and level of literacy during an initial interview,
- b. Encourage tutors to engage in ongoing evaluation exercises with their students, and,
- c. Provide access to professional assessment in the case of learners with special needs.

Evaluation Criteria *(informed by guiding principles 1, 2 & 5)*

In what ways does the scheme ensure that:

- Initial and ongoing assessment is conducted according to an ethical code of confidentiality, respect and trust?
- Cultural differences are understood and respected in the context of assessment procedures?
- Learners are active participants in the evaluation of their own learning?

Quality Statement 6

Guidance and Progression

A quality programme will provide students and tutors with information and guidance about a variety of learning opportunities and progression routes.

Evaluation Criteria *(informed by guidance principles 2, 3 & 5)*

In what way does the scheme ensure that:

- Learners and tutors have access to an adult-appropriate information and guidance service?
- The guidance service operates according to an ethical code of confidentiality and respect?
- The guidance service respects cultural difference?
- Learners have access to information and guidance about progression routes (vertical and horizontal) both within the scheme and in external education and training agencies?
- Learners have an opportunity to participate in the definition and development of progression routes?

Quality Statement 7

Student Accreditation

A quality programme will include in its provision a range of accredited courses at a variety of levels.

Evaluation Criteria *(informed by guiding principles 3 & 4)*

In what ways does the scheme ensure that:

- Learners have access to accredited courses, which enable them as learners and have a currency beyond the scheme?
- Accredited courses are offered to students as one option among others?

Quality Statement 8

Outcomes for Students

A quality programme will:

- a. Recognise and validate a variety of quantitative and qualitative learning outcomes.
- b. Understand the importance of celebrating and documenting unanticipated outcomes.

Evaluation Criteria *(informed by guiding principles 2,3 & 5)*

In what ways does the scheme ensure that:

- Outcomes are related to learner goals?
- Developmental outcomes such as confidence, self-esteem and citizenship are recognised and validated?
- Learners are involved in the process of identifying and documenting unanticipated outcomes?

Programme Elements

Quality Statement 1

Sensitive and Creative Promotional Strategies

A quality programme will:

- a. Engage in a proactive outreach strategies in order to attract potential students
- b. Adopt a positive and sensitive approach to recruitment.

Evaluation Criteria *(informed by guiding principles 1 & 20)*

In what ways does the scheme ensure that:

- Learners with ABE needs in the local area are made aware of the nature and extent of the service available?
- The language and imagery used in promotional strategies respects the self-concept and culture of prospective students?

Quality Statement 2

Links with Other Groups

A quality programme will:

- a. Develop links with a wide range of local, regional and national organisations
- b. Work with them according to the principles of partnership in order to ensure that the diverse needs of students are adequately met.

Evaluation Criteria *(informed by guiding principles 1, 2, 3 & 5)*

In what ways does the scheme ensure that:

- Local voluntary and statutory groups are aware of the nature and extent of the service it provides?
- Sensitive and effective referral procedures are in place?
- Appropriate progression routes are identified and developed in partnership with local and regional education and training agencies?

- The capacity of local and regional groups to meet the diverse social and cultural needs of students is fully utilised?

Quality Statement 3

Additional Adult Support

A quality programme will provide additional support to students who require:

- Financial assistance in respect of examination fees, childcare, transport etc.,
- Specialist assessment, tuition, resources and expertise.

Evaluation Criteria (Informed by guiding principles 1 & 2)

In what ways does the scheme ensure that:

- Prospective students who may encounter a range of situational barriers are enabled to avail of tuition?
- Learners who need to avail of financial assistance are treated according to an ethical code of confidentiality and respect? Students with special learning needs receive the support they require?

Quality Statement 4

Staff Training and Development

A quality programme will ensure that all staff, whether voluntary or paid, will:

- Receive appropriate initial training to recognised standards,
- Receive quality in-service training on a regular basis, and,
- Have access to formally accredited training if they so wish.

Evaluation Criteria (*informed by all of the guiding principles*)

In what ways does the scheme ensure that:

- All tutors and managers receive training, which is informed by the guiding principles of the scheme?
- Tutors and managers receive ongoing training, which keeps them in touch with fresh ideas about the principles and practices of teaching and learning?
- Tutors and managers have opportunities on an ongoing basis to reflect on and share aspects of their practice?
- Learners have input into tutor training?
- Tutors and managers have access to appropriate accreditation options?

Quality Statement 5

Resources for Teaching and Learning

A quality programme will ensure that both tutors and learners have access to:

- A range of books and other print materials.
- Audio, video, computer and photocopying equipment.
- Information and communication technology.

Evaluation Criteria (*informed by guiding principles 2, 3 & 5*)

In what ways does the scheme ensure that:

- Teaching and learning resources reflect cultural diversity?
- Teaching and learning resources meet the diverse needs, interests and aptitudes of learners and tutors?
- Teaching and learning resources are regularly reviewed and evaluated by staff and learners?

Quality Statement 6

Planning for Programme Services

A quality programme will devote time and resources to planning on an annual basis.

Evaluation Criteria *(informed by guiding principles 2, 3 and 5)*

In what ways does the scheme ensure that:

- Programme planning is informed by a respect for cultural differences?
- The voice of students, tutors and managers are heard and respected in the planning process?
- All programme planning pays due attention to the creation and maintenance of an atmosphere of social interaction and informality within the scheme?
- Adequate time is devoted to programme planning?

Quality Statement 7

Programme Evaluation

A quality programme will ensure that:

- a. All aspects of the scheme are evaluated on a regular basis.
- b. There are procedures in place for recording, monitoring and disseminating the results of the evaluation.

Evaluation Criteria *(informed by all guiding principles)*

In what way does the scheme ensure that:

- All aspects of practice are informed by the guiding principles of the scheme?
- Evaluation is conducted according to an ethical code of confidentiality, respect and trust?
- Evaluation is conducted in a spirit of respect for cultural differences?
- Evaluation procedures do not militate against the maintenance of an atmosphere of social interaction and informality within the scheme?
- Learners, tutors and managers are active participants in the evaluation process?
- Procedures for performance appraisal and mutual accountability are developed within the scheme?
- The results of evaluation inform future plans?

Quality Statement 8

Premises

A quality programme will provide tuition in safe, comfortable, accessible premises, where there is adequate and appropriate space for a wide range of educational and social activities.

Evaluation Criteria *(informed by guiding principles 1, 2, 4 & 5)*

In what ways does the scheme ensure that:

- The premises are accessible to students with physical difficulties?
- That the building is designed and decorated in a manner which helps to create a welcoming and informal atmosphere?
- Those learners have a say in how the building is used?
- That there is an appropriate space for confidential interviews?

Quality Statement 9

Scheme Funding

A quality programme will

- a. Determine its resource needs in the light of what is required in order to deliver a quality service
- b. Access the required resources from appropriate funding agencies.

Evaluation Criteria *(informed by all of the guiding principles)*

In what does the scheme ensure that:

- Learners, tutors and managers participate in reviewing and determining resource needs?
- The resource implications of scheme plans are communicated to appropriate funding bodies?
- Accounting and financial information is shared?
- Diverse sources of funding are identified and explored?

Annex 4: A Summary of Experiences Emerging from Phase 2 Implementation.

i) *Experience from Evaluation Teams: comments on the quality statements*

The following includes six examples of how the local evaluation teams worked and reported on their work. The reports demonstrate a variety of ways in which the centres went about examining the statements. The six examples are from four different statements in the framework. The identity of each centre is protected. Some of the centres, at the time of writing, are continuing with development work on other statements.

- **Quality Statement 1- Welcome and Initial contact (2 examples)**
- **Quality Statement 2 -Student-tutor Relationship (2 example)**
- **Quality Statement 11- Staff training and Development (1 example)**
- **Quality Statement 12- Resources for Teaching and Learning (1 example)**

<i>Example 1: Quality Statement 1 - Welcome and Initial Contact</i>
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This statement was developed by a rural community based adult learning scheme.

The Statement:

A quality programme will:

- Listen to the students in order to negotiate a starting point for his/her learning based on his/her needs, interests, expectations and goals.
- Share information with the student about how the scheme/centre works
- Refer the student to an appropriate programme if the scheme/centre is not in a position to meet his/her needs

Performance Indicators

The scheme should have information on:

- How the scheme is responding to new students
- How the scheme is following up on past students
- What information is available about other programmes
- Initial response in student's words and in pictures

Performance Measures

The indicators can be measured through:

- Scheme records
- Narratives from students
- Pictures drawn by students

Data Collection

The data can be collected from:

- Research of scheme records by the Adult Literacy Organiser
- Collection of student narratives and pictures by the Adult Literacy Organiser

Data Analysis

What is important is that there should be:

- An immediate response to a request for tuition
- A friendly and welcoming atmosphere
- Sensitivity to each individual's situation
- Appropriate welcoming personality of initial person contacted
- Continuity and follow-up for each student
- A supportive atmosphere

Programme Improvement- Ideas

- Premises should be more attractive and comfortable

Programme Improvement- Plans

- Information leaflet for student and tutor with contact names
- Increase opportunities for students and tutors to network

Evaluation Team Reflection

The local team made the following observations about their involvement:

The scheme, as part of its ongoing evaluation process is constantly looking to tutors and students for information and suggestions on how to improve the scheme. Time and some financial resources were available to us for this pilot which made our involvement in the quality framework easier. It therefore follows that if these resources were made available to us on an ongoing basis the evaluation of procedures could be completed more quickly and refinements could be put in place as appropriate.

The project has had the following benefits:

1. Benefits for the Scheme:

- It gave an opportunity for people involved in the scheme to meet together
- It provided students with an insight into the tutor's experience (and vice versa for tutors)
- It provided an opportunity to 'brainstorm' for new ideas
- Some of the issues which were raised were examined and some have been remedied immediately
- The project enabled sharing of ideas with other schemes
- The exercise reminded us of the importance of respect and confidentiality for both tutor and student.

2 Benefits for individual team members

The pilot had benefits for students as follows:

- It provided a sense of ownership of the scheme
- It provided insight into tutor training
- It gave an opportunity for students to meet other members of the scheme
- It provided a comfortable environment in which it was possible to contribute to the development process
- It provided an informal learning atmosphere between students and staff

The pilot had benefits for tutors as follows:

- It provided an opportunity to network with other tutors
- It allowed time and an opportunity to express issues in a proactive environment
- It gave a sense of worth within the scheme
- It provided an opportunity to record ideas and put them into the proper context to be dealt with by the scheme.

Example 2 – Quality Statement 1 Welcome and Initial Contact

An inner city family resource centre developed this statement.

The Statement:

A quality programme will:

- Listen to the students in order to negotiate a starting point for his/her learning based on his/her needs, interests, expectations and goals.
- Share information with the student about how the scheme/centre works
- Refer the student to an appropriate programme if the scheme/centre is not in a position to meet his/her needs

Performance Indicators and Measures

The team agreed on the following indicators and measures:

	Indicators	Measures
Input	A quality scheme will have information available for the student on the scheme and the various options available	Samples of the type of information, written, visual, verbal made available to the student at the initial interview
Input	A quality scheme will have resources, which ensure that the initial interview can be carried out in a proper fashion. These should include access to privacy, a well resourced office, tea and coffee, a comfortable place to talk	Check list of the resources which the Scheme can offer on the initial contract
Process	The interview should be conducted in a way which makes the student feel comfortable, respected and listened to	Consultation/questionnaire with a selection of students from the Scheme
Output	The organiser/interviewer should be able to offer valuable information to the tutor about the student needs and preferred starting point	Consultation/questionnaire with a selection of tutors from the Scheme

Data Collection and Analysis

The team has compiled a tutor and student questionnaire. A survey was also conducted among the local agencies, chemists, police station and schools. The team felt that the timing of the survey would have been better organised earlier in the year.

The results of the questionnaire were as follows:

- The students questioned were very satisfied with the initial consultation and with the tutor they were allocated
- It was found that the majority of students were referred to the scheme by relatives and friends

Evaluation Team Reflection

- Positive outcomes were an opportunity to examine the welcome and initial contact in the scheme and to affirm that the scheme fulfilled the criteria set out in the chosen statements.
- The pilot provided an opportunity to show that the evaluation team could work extremely well together
- The meetings ran smoothly

- Some were encountered with the 'jargon' used for evaluation, but people were comfortable enough with each other to voice their problems
- It was felt that the time required to fully examine and develop performance indicators, measures and evaluation criteria for the sixteen quality statements was very great and that it could be problematic finding time for this

Example 3: Quality Statement 2 Student –Tutor Relationships

This statement was developed by the adult basic education co-ordinators for a large county

The Statement:

A quality programme will:

- Recognise that the student-tutor relationship is based on mutual respect, trust and collaboration
- Respect the adult status of the student
- Ensure that the student's goals, needs, and interest remain at the heart of the learning process
- Understand that both student and tutor contribute to learn from the tuition process
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Performance Indicators

Inputs:	Tutor training, which emphasises:	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - respect - confidentiality - the equality of the relationship - student centred tuition - support for tutors and students 	
Process:	Groups:	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - informal atmosphere where shared - information remains in the room - agreement before visitors are invited - general courtesy observed 	
	One-to-one:	
	Both student and tutor are encouraged to express, in confidence, their opinion to the organiser who can reallocate another tutor if necessary.	
Outputs:	A learning programme agreed between learner and tutor	
Outcome:	Learner can	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Express their own learning needs - Discuss options - Demonstrate growth in confidence
Measure:	Monthly review of the learning plan Tutor support in developing the plan Student contribution to the evaluation process Tutor response to student evaluation	
Data Collection:	Quarterly progress report compiled by the organiser Delivery of training and evaluation of programme	
Analysis:	Evaluate data collected using evaluation criteria and guiding principles	
Scheme Practice:	The new process becomes normal routine	

Example 4: Quality Statement 2: Student –Tutor Relationships

This statement was developed by staff and students in an adult basic education centre in a small town, which also has students attending from across the county.

The Statement:

A quality programme will:

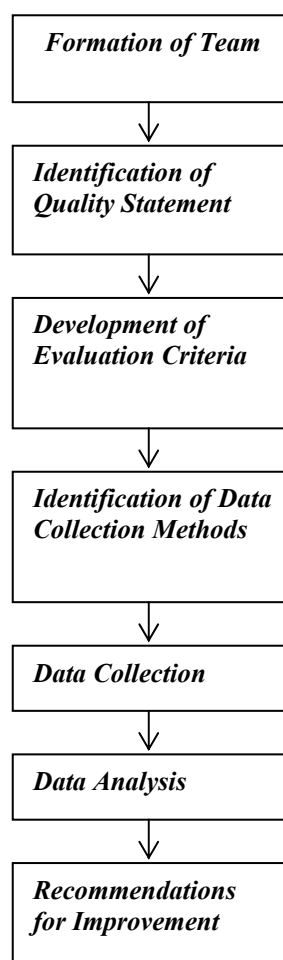
- a) Recognise that the student-tutor relationship is based on mutual respect, trust and collaboration
- b) Respect the adult status of the student
- c) Ensure that the student's goals, needs, and interest remain at the heart of the learning process
- d) Understand that both student and tutor contribute to learn from the tuition process

Introduction

The evaluation team worked together for six months and during this time learned a lot, laughed a lot and worked hard at making sense of this evaluation process embarked on together. We found it to be a worthwhile exercise to look at our scheme objectively. One quality statement was evaluated and what follows is an explanation of how we did it and what we learned from it.

The team reached consensus to evaluate Quality Statement 2, relating to the student-tutor relationship in our scheme. We felt that interpersonal communication is at the core of effective literacy provision and that an evaluation of this quality statement would give a good indication to the standard of relationships within the scheme and where attention should be given for improvement.

Process Applied



Performance Indicators and Measures

The performance of the scheme was analysed according to the four guidelines given in the 'Evolving Quality Framework Workbook'. These state that in relation to student-Tutor relationship, a quality programme will:

- Recognise that the student-tutor relationship is based on mutual respect, trust and collaboration
- Respect the adult status of the student
- Ensure that the student's goals, needs and interests remain at the heart of the learning process
- Understand that both student and tutor contribute to and learn from the tuition process

The evaluation team felt that the four elements of the quality statement mentioned above, are indicators of an effective student-tutor relationship. Ways in which these indicators could be verified were examined. These ideas are present in the scheme and are recognised as important by managers, tutors and students.

Data Collection

Three key questions were raised:

- Are the measures for the quality statement present in the scheme?
- Where are the potential difficulties?
- How can we improve on the current state of the student-tutor relationship in our scheme?

The following documents were examined to see whether and to what degree the quality statement and its indicators are portrayed in them.

- Annual reports
- Record sheets and student log books
- Tutor training material

As a further check, the team also looked at the experience of students and tutors to see if the element of the student-tutor relationship were present in reality. This was done, by developing questionnaires for students and tutors. The student questionnaires were completed by students of different centres in the scheme and returned to the main centre to ensure the confidentiality of the students. The tutor questionnaire was sent out to tutors and a tutor meeting was subsequently held in each of the three main centres, where a reflective time was created for completion of the questionnaires and for receiving feedback from the tutors. Six students were asked what they felt were the key issues in developing a good tutor-student relationship.

The tutors were asked the following:

- What does the student-tutor relationship mean to you as a result of training?
- During initial training, what difference does it make meeting a student, rather than reading/hearing about one?
- Describe the relationship between you and your student
- Who decides which work will be done?
- Describe the atmosphere in your sessions
- Explain why you do/don't use a record sheet

Data Analysis

Student response:

The questionnaires received from the students strongly affirmed the scheme's performance in relation to the indicators used. The words (or synonyms) in the indicators occurred in the questionnaires to describe the students' experience of the relationship between them and their tutors. An interesting observation made by the students on the team was that they felt secure and that their confidentiality and

trust was respected. This was so because they found it so difficult to obtain information from the other students. This affirms the confidentiality and trust is the practice in the scheme

Tutors' experience:

The data collected strongly supports the quality statement and even though precaution was taken not to pre-judge the situation, the words that came forward correlated with the words used in the quality statement. The same was apparent from the feedback received at the tutor meetings.

Tutors felt that no training can fully prepare one for meeting a student in person. Meeting a student gives one a much better understanding for the experience and reality of the difficulties experienced by students and for the sensitivity required in dealing with these.

Another heartening observation made by numerous tutors was that with time, the relationship between them and their students became a truly equal one, as the friendship develops. The only cautionary observation that arose from this part of the data analysis was the fact that trainee tutors would not want to meet students too early in the course, because they would not feel equipped to deal with the situation adequately.

<i>Documents</i>	<i>Affirmation of Quality Indicators</i>	<i>Difficulties</i>
Annual Reports	Affirmed	The extent of the information
Record Sheets and Log Books	Affirmed	Not all tutors keep regular records
Tutor Training Material	Strongly affirmed	Mostly dealing with the <i>ideal</i> situation

Action Plan

The evaluation team valued the positive response received about the present quality of the student-tutor relationship. At the same time it was happy to take on board some suggestions for improvement that resulted from the research.

The areas for improvement are mainly concerned with training. This does not adequately prepare tutors for the serious barriers to learning that some students may encounter. This should be included in the training, but dealt with in a very sensitive way, because it may scare prospective tutors away. The current situation in the scheme is that this is mentioned at the initial training, but not sufficiently. A short section dealing with this should be included in the training pack.

Another aspect of the training that should receive more emphasis is record keeping. Tutors should be made more aware of its value and that it is an essential part of keeping track of the tuition process. An aspect that was not evaluated, but that would have been worthwhile including in our evaluation, is the benefit that students receive from taking part in training prospective tutors.

Evaluation Team Reflection

The evaluation team felt that before the entire quality framework could be implemented, it would have to be simplified and streamlined. It would require continued support from a facilitator or support worker in this scheme. Extra resources would be needed to implement an ongoing basis and it would need to be scheduled into the scheme's year plan as an essential rather than an optional.

Benefits for individual team members from participating in the quality framework:

- Members learned from each others perspectives and experiences
- Members benefited from the bond and openness that developed among the team members
- Realisation emerged of how trustworthy other members are
- Members gained a better understanding of the mechanics of the scheme
- Members gained an understanding of the evaluation process

Benefits for the scheme from participating in the quality framework:

- Input was received from all those involved in the scheme and this gave a more holistic picture
- Time and space was created to look objectively at the scheme
- The process helped the scheme to focus on areas that need improvement
- It explored ways to look critically at practice and possible ways to improve what we are doing
- It gave the scheme the opportunity to celebrate good practice that is in place
- It helped prioritise work
- It provided a foundation for future evaluation in the scheme
- It helped the scheme to understand the value, process, language and terminology of evaluation
- The presence of a facilitator made the evaluation process more accessible for the scheme

It is hoped that these benefits will be disseminated amongst all those concerned via the annual report, the scheme newsletter and the initiatives of 'Literacy Awareness Week'.

Having mentioned the many benefits and the fact that evaluation is regarded as an important aspect of running a scheme efficiently, the scheme recommends that the evaluation team's reservations about and criticism regarding the current form of the quality framework be taken into consideration. Before the entire Quality Framework could be implemented, these would have to be addressed. These would include concerns about it being:

- Cumbersome and ambiguous
- Time consuming
- Too many quality statements with too little difference between them
- The need for continued support from the facilitator/support worker in the scheme

Example 5: Quality Statement 11- Staff Training and Development

The college organiser for adult literacy and a team of tutors (including voluntary tutors) developed this statement in a large multi -site College of Further Education

The Statement:

A quality programme will:

- Ensure that all tutors and organisers/managers receive quality initial training in the principles and practice of ABE
- Ensure that all tutors and organisers/managers receive quality in-service training free of charge ,on a regular basis;
- Ensure that all tutors and organisers/managers have access to formally accredited training if they so wish;
- Have staff meetings on a regular basis
- Have an appropriate training policy for all its staff ,whether voluntary or paid

Performance Indicators

Performance Measures

The indicators can be measured through:

- Examining range of staff Development programmes in operation
- Ongoing monitoring of training programmes
- Monitoring of existing accreditation taken by staff (i.e. *City & Guilds* ABE accreditation)
- Preparing Reports of training events for dissemination
- Examining agenda and minutes of team meetings to evaluate new learning
- Examination of information leaflets and handouts provided to staff
- Looking for evidence in quality monitoring reports which have been produced for the college(For example, *Investors in People Certificate*; external evaluation reports etc;)

Data Collection

Data to support the above would be gathered from a range of sources

- Examination of documentation in centre
- Feedback from questionnaires/discussions with ABE staff
- Discussion at staff meetings

Data Analysis/Programme improvement Ideas

The evaluation team carried out a SWOT analysis to determine the effectiveness of their training programmes and to discover what needs to be done . The results were as follows:

Strengths

- The training is student-centred
- The college has a positive policy towards staff development
- The college has its own nationally approved training programmes for ABE
- As well as tutoring, tutors are also involved in the delivery of training courses which leads to interaction at all levels and a raised awareness of student needs and current good practice
- The Adult Literacy Organiser and head of Department is supportive of training

Weakness

- There is a lack of training in ABE awareness for managers
- There is no designated time for core team meetings
- There is a lack of dissemination of information after training events

Opportunities

- The College Director is putting particular emphasis on adult basic education
- Present government policy lays emphasis on the need to improve literacy and numeracy provision and is providing financial incentives to achieve this
- the quality framework project is providing new opportunities to assess and evaluate training needs
- Greater competence among staff will enable staff to deliver a wider range of programmes
- Increased training is likely to lead to greater client satisfaction

Threats

- There is a lack of financial commitment towards training in the college
- More time is needed to develop, and deliver training
- Funding is needed to support the ongoing training of staff
- Insecurity of employment for many staff militates against involvement in training

Programme Improvement Plans

- Develop an awareness training programme for managers
- Timetable core team meetings
- Involve senior management including the college director in decisions about ABE training
- Enhance opportunities for staff to feedback their views about their training needs
- Provide more information to staff about training

Example 6: Quality Statement 12: Resources for Teaching and Learning

A county team made up of a voluntary tutor, a group tutor, two students, a manager of adult literacy and a local area organiser for adult literacy developed this statement.

The Statement:

A quality programme will:

- Ensure that both tutors and students have access to a range of books and other print materials
- Provide access to audio, video, computer, and photocopying equipment
- Provide access to information and communication technology
- Ensure that the tutors have access to a range of materials and teaching methodologies

Performance Indicators

- Print and ICT resources should be accessible and be able to meet the diverse needs of students and tutors
- The resources should be continually updated

Data Collection

- To establish student's needs the team decided to draw up a questionnaire
- A sub committee was formed to carry out an inventory of materials
- A meeting of all literacy tutors was organised to record tutors views

Data Analysis

The questionnaire revealed the following:

- The amount and range of materials in the resource room was found to be very good.
- A wide variety of equipment was available, but there was a lack of knowledge about how to use the equipment
- Training was required in the use of computer software and equipment.
- Space in the resource room was a problem.
- A database of resources would be of value to students and tutors
- Gaps were identified in levels of materials
- There is a need for more Irish focused learning material
- Students want more work on computers

Action Plan

The team is seeking to implement the majority of the recommendations from the survey by:

- Undertaking an inventory of material-software and equipment
- Re-organising and cataloguing the resource room
- Providing in-service training for tutors on computer software and on the use of the centre's equipment
- Purchasing new equipment such as a walk-in's and a camera
- Seeking out more Irish orientated material
- Organising more computer classes for students

Future Implementation

The centre plans to hold an information session to discuss other quality statements. Thereafter the centre sees evaluation as a continuous activity for the centre. To further implement the quality framework the scheme anticipates that:

- An outside facilitator is essential for objectivity
- The time scale for evaluation needs to be longer
- The centre needs to decide on realistic number of statements to examine each year
- It is essential to have an evaluation team to examine the statements

Evaluation Team Reflection

What worked

Team cohesiveness
Suitability of accommodation and facilities for evaluation
Use of shorter sessions and morning sessions
Being able to select the indicator
Participation of everyone in the group

What didn't work

Time frame too short
Language of Framework
Team slow getting into the work
First two sessions were too far apart

S.W.O.T Analysis of the Quality Framework

Strengths

- Helps to show up gaps in provision
- Involvement of student/tutors and management together
- Adult Literacy Organisers co-operating together
- Applying a quality standard nationally

Weakness

- Language in the document confusing
- Initially programme was complicated
- Work load too great for time allocated
- Opportunity for change not with local organisers (lay with Adult Literacy Organiser)

Opportunities

- Everyone was able to analyse the provision
- Working together as a team
- Reflecting together
- To meet the needs of both students and tutors
- everyone had an opportunity to express their opinions
- The team got to know the work of the scheme

Threats

- The teams work was under the microscope
- Tutors questioned their ability to be a 'good' tutor
- Fear of the unknown
- Students on team were worried about the value of their contribution (initially)
- Team worried about the time commitment

Recommendations

- A facilitator from outside the scheme is necessary to facilitate the process
- There should be more liaison with other schemes who are involved in examining the same statements
- Extra funding would be required for the continued evaluation of the quality framework
- There is a need to continue to encourage the development of Irish produced resources for teaching and learning

ii) ***Student Experience of involvement in the quality project: comments from a learner***

The following are comments of a learner about aspects of the quality framework. The comments about his experience in taking part in the project were written by the learner.

When I first heard about the quality project I was very interested in it because it was looking at the possibility of setting up quality standards for ABE programmes. It was suggested that I might ask some of the other learners in my class about the kind of things they felt were important in ABE. We discussed what people need to know before starting learning and whether we would like more classes to be available. As a learner I was particularly interested in the part of the framework dealing with the student experience elements. I felt that all the quality statements were good, but I would just like to make a few comments.

Quality statement 1 (b) share information with the student about how the centre/scheme works.

I feel that for evaluation purposes each centre should have a structured induction e.g. induction checklist so that everyone gets the same information and opportunities: for example about the library and the guidance interview.

Quality statement 2 - Students understand their responsibilities as learners.

These responsibilities could be given in writing rather than a vague statement. Also, we hear a lot about the rights of the learner but the tutor must have rights as well.

Quality statement 3 - Requesting a change of tutor

During induction this should be explained as a natural part of the learning process so that learners do not feel guilty about changing tutors nor tutors about changing learners.

Quality statement 4 - Initial assessment

I think that one of the most important things is to find out how a person learns by looking at how they learned to do other things e.g. learned to drive, to cook. This style of learning can then be used to help improve reading/writing.

Quality statement 5 - Guidance/Progression

I feel that it is as important for ABE learners to have the same opportunity for guidance as it is for those who are doing further/higher education.

Quality statement 6 - Student accreditation

I know that it is important to many learners to get a certificate but not at the expense of building a good foundation of basic skills e.g. spelling. When I first joined an ABE class I gained a certificate at entry level. Yes, I knew the correct format for a formal letter but I did not know how to spell the words in the letter! The tutor, without any structured spelling programme being designed had simply corrected my mistakes. I feel that one of the reasons for this is that tutors, particularly volunteer tutors may not feel confident about giving help with spelling. As a learner who has benefited from ABE, I feel that there is some room for improvement and I hope that this project will enable better schemes to develop everywhere.